FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Putting God First in Your Family

Guest:	Terence Chatmon
From the series:	Do Your Children Believe? (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: As a parent, you probably know what you'd like your kids to look like, spiritually, when they're adults. The question is: "What are you doing to help them get there?" Here's Terence Chatmon.

Terence: I realized that less than one percent of Christians have an intentional, spiritual development plan for their home—less than one percent. And we are a people of planners—we plan vacations / we plan a whole lot of things. I can simply say to you that our marketers—they know what they want for your children. The internet—they know what they want for your children. Our school systems—they know what they want for your children. The idea is: "Do you have an intentional plan in process to develop your kids in the Lord?"

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll talk today about setting spiritual goals and developing a plan to help your children grow in Christ. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. There is a Bible verse that we have quoted often on *FamilyLife Today*. Most of the time, when we quote it, we take it out of context; but I think that's okay; don't you? [Laughter]

Dennis: You're saying we've been quoting a Bible verse, now, for—

Bob: —for 25 years, out of context.

Dennis: —25 years out of context?

Bob: But I think it is okay. The Bible verse is 3 John 4; and in that—

Dennis: Of course.

Bob: —Bible verse, the Apostle John, who as far as we know, was never married and had no biological children.

Dennis: Right.

Bob: He says, “I have no greater joy than this to know that my children are walking in the truth.” He’s referring to his spiritual children. We often apply that to our physical children—who, I guess, are our spiritual children as well—or at least, we hope they are; right?

Dennis: I would hope they are. And we have a guest with us today on the broadcast who I think would bear witness with that verse that’s been put on a lot of gravestones. Terence Chatmon joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Terence, welcome back.

Terence: Thank you so much. It’s a pleasure to be here.

Dennis: Terence has written a book called *Do Your Children Believe?* It’s addressing the issue—really, I think, an urgent issue / a vital issue for the next generation of believers of children who are leaving the faith / leaving church after they graduate from high school/college; and they’re really not coming back to their roots.

Terence and his wife Wanda have three children. Wanda and he have been married for 34 years. Terence, it took your wife getting your attention on this subject on a planning retreat?—it was a celebration of your 15 anniversary, I think; right?

Terence: Yes, my feisty wife. I’m just man enough to take her on this nice retreat. We went off every year and celebrated some time together. This was our 15-year anniversary. I had this great idea: “What if we had three questions to talk about?”—you know—“Where we’ve been in the last 15 years,” “Where we are today,” and “Where we’re going.”

Dennis: Right; right.

Terence: That doesn’t sound very sexy on a marriage retreat; but to me, it sounded like some good questions we needed to talk about. In the midst of that conversation, we talked about our family / where we’ve been—the kids certainly knew who Christ was—they had a personal relationship with the Lord / they were walking with Him. But during the process, she asked me a question: “Well, are the kids prepared to defend their faith after high school?”

Now, our kids were between the ages of about ten and thirteen/fourteen years old at the time. We looked at each other—we chatted about. We had to come to the conclusion they were not prepared to defend their faith after high school. And we knew the statistics—you know, 60- to 70-some percent of [graduates] after high school—they are walking away from the faith / walking away from the church completely.

She turned to me; and in her wisdom, she says: “Well, what are you going to do about it?” [Terence]: “What am I going to do about it?” [Wanda]: “You’re the spiritual leader of the home—what are you going to do about it?”

Bob: Ooh! [Laughter]

Dennis: So, you cast it back on her; huh?

Terence: Isn't that the right thing to do?

Dennis: No. [Laughter]

Terence: So, I threw it back at her. She says: "Listen, that's not my role. You've abdicated that role to me and the church, and that's no longer—so, here's the idea: 'What are you going to do about it?'" I reflected on that. I realized that, although I was being "successful" in corporate America—and even in the church / serving in the church, youth ministry, and so forth—ministering to many kids—I was failing as the spiritual leader of my own home.

Dennis: For a number of years, FamilyLife did a survey of people in the church, just asking them what their greatest needs were in their marriage and in their family. The number one need in their family—that they responded to in this research—was that: "We need help in spiritually growing our children."

Terence: That's exactly it. In fact, number one, I'm seeing is moral and spiritual decay.

Dennis and Bob, I wanted to do the right thing; I just didn't know how. I didn't know how to lead my kids in such a way—I had abdicated that to the church and said, "That's your role,"—to my wife / she was doing a great job. Here I am—you know, I'm supposed to be the spiritual leader of the home—so she challenged me. I went back and took some time and said: "Lord, I *want* to be the spiritual leader of my home. I want to do a better job at this, but I need Your help. I need You more than ever."

Bob: You know, what you're describing—we have been working here, at FamilyLife, for a while now, on a project that we're going to be sharing more and more with our listeners about over the coming months. We've been working on a video series on *The Art of Parenting*.

Kind of at the core of what we're seeing, as we look at what's going on with Christian parents today, is the scenario that you describe—active, church-going families, where everybody would affirm the truth / would believe the right thing—but where the level of spiritual engagement inside the home is very shallow. It's a subcontracting mentality that the Christian school, or the youth pastor, or somebody else is supposed to do this—very little Scripture being talked about / very little prayer happening inside the home—we just assume that. We're uncomfortable knowing how to do that. As a result, our kids are growing up confused; aren't they?

Terence: Yes; they really are. We can't teach what we don't know. And what He did was so gentle to me is—the Lord took me to His Word. I just—the first year, I said: "Lord, I need Your help more than ever. Guide me; direct me; lead me down this path." He took me on a path the first year—He took me to His Word—and we went through Genesis to Revelation together. I went through it with one question each year: "God, I know You; but let's just get to it. I want to know *exactly* who You are. I understand Your

sovereignty. I understand who You are and Your makeup; but you know what? Let's get into it—let's read from Genesis to Revelation with one question per year—the first year: 'Who are You?'"

The second year, with the same exercise—Genesis to Revelation—but asking the question: "Who am I?" If I'm made in Your image, and I am the one to be the spiritual leader of this home, then, tell me, "What does that look like?" First, what He had to show me was my total depravity—who I was. When you reflect on who you are versus His standards, it is a very *humbling* experience, as you know.

The third year, then, I knew I needed Christ—understanding in an even deeper way. So, I said, "Okay; I want to know who this Christ is more than I've ever known Him,"—beyond redemption; right?—to understand His love and how *deep* that runs—what took place on that cross was so amazing. That was a rich year for me / a very fulfilling year.

And in the fourth year, the question was: "How would You use me, Lord?" What was so humbling—He says: "I can't use you at all. I can't use a *you* [who] thinks it's still about *you*. I can't use a you that thinks that you can do something." In fact, in John 15, He says, "You can do nothing." I looked up "nothing" in Greek, and you know what it means?—absolutely nothing.

Bob: No thing. [Laughter]

Terence: Yes; so I went through the process; and I said, "Forgive me, Lord." He taught me four words I talk about in this book. He needs a you that is dependent on Him. He needs a you that's [surrendering]—really understanding His mercy. He needs a you that understands what it means to sacrifice and the sacrifice He made on the cross. And He needs a you with great humility.

He says, "I can use you, but we still have some work to do." So, He put me into my life—and other formats of learning in my life—and it really changed the way I looked at this responsibility of being the spiritual leader of my home.

Dennis: I love where you started. You started in the Book—let the Book declare who God is—and ask God to reveal Himself / to show you who He is. If our listeners haven't read this passage of Scripture recently, I'd encourage them to go to Psalm 78 and read the first 8 or 9 verses that are in there; because it talks about—it really talks about passing on who God is—an introduction to who God is—to your children.

Then, secondly, not just passing on the knowledge *about* God—but you're experience of God, as a parent, to your children so that you're not just passing on dogma, doctrine, truth. There's nothing wrong with that—we need to be passing on truth—but we need to be passing on our own *experience* of what God's doing in our life. That's what I heard you saying as you read through the Bible.

This passage also begins, though—it says, “What we have heard from our fathers”—it’s something that we have learned from our earthly fathers. What did you learn from your dad, growing up, spiritually-speaking?

Terence: You know, I came to faith through my parents. They shared the gospel with me as—we didn’t go to church just on Sunday. We went to church Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—I think we had Thursday off. Friday was fish fries—so we went there too.

But the one thing I learned more than anything from my parents—one, is this idea of love. If you had a picture of love, you could probably place my mother’s picture right in the Bible next to it. Dad—he demonstrated what it meant to walk this life as a Christian—high character, high integrity, talked about what it meant and what our responsibilities were, as a child. You know, he wanted us to have impact and great impact in this nation.

And one of the things, as I was growing up in the ‘60s/’70s—and faced many trials in Chicago / and certainly had reason, a lot of times, to go in a different direction—maybe, to hate more than I loved—but he demonstrated to me that, especially in the workplace, that we are to recognize that everyone in the workplace and everyone in life has *intrinsic* value. That’s the one thing I remember him continuing to just harp: “Everyone has *intrinsic* value.”

When I thought about that type of thinking—his thought was: “Whether they’re a janitor or whether they’re president in an organization, the Lord made them in a special way. They have special gifts.” The idea is: “How do you optimize those gifts in that individual?”

When it comes to the spiritual side, that’s the same challenge we have: “How do we demonstrate this Christ-like behavior to our children?” I thought I was doing something special, and they would recognize something amazing—like when I’m sharing the gospel or doing different things.

You know, what they recognize—the fact that Dad was worshiping in the church—they know I hate to sing, and worship, and things like that—and that was—I can sing a little bit, but that was out of rebellion to my eighth grade teacher; okay? [Laughter] She wanted me to sing. I was doing very well in a spelling bee. I felt that she didn’t treat me with the most respect, and I lost the spelling bee—came in second place. As a result—she was my music teacher—so, my rebellion was I wasn’t going to sing anymore. She put me in the corner until I would sing, and I wouldn’t sing. I was kind of a stubborn guy—not that my kids reflect that at all.

As a result, I wouldn’t worship in church; but you know, when my heart was being transformed and just really pricked and prodded. I’m prone to—one of the things I did was just begin to worship to the Lord in a mighty way in church. That’s what they notice: “*Dad*, we knew you were real when we see things that you probably don’t even recognize that we see a changed life.”

Dennis: You know, what you're talking about, again, is passing on what you possess / what you had experienced. Your wife was prodding you / was encouraging you to take upon yourself the mantle of spiritual responsibility for your family / the spiritual growth of your children.

Where did you start?—because you developed a plan—and maybe, the best place to start is explain what your plan embodied: "What was it like? What did you do?"

Terence: Yes. So, first, I wanted them to understand a call. I went back—I went back to my own life experiences in life and reflected on that. At that time, I was at a very high position in one of the top beverages companies in the world. We learned how to do planning—that's one of the things I *did* know how to do. We know how to write billion dollar plans in 45 minutes—so I reflected on that.

The first thing that we understand in business is: "What is your vision? What's your mental image? What are you trying to achieve? What's on the far horizon?"

So, the first thing I did: "Well, what is the vision I have for my own family? Where do I want to take this family 20/30 years from now?" You know, we're not making disciples for five-year-olds. I wanted to make disciples when they were 21/25 years old.

Dennis: Right; right.

Terence: So, that's the process. I started with: "Where's the vision? Where would You have me to go?" Secondly, I looked at it and said, "Well, where have we been?" I wanted to look at our history. I went and contacted some folks who could share with me our family's spiritual history. That took me to my Aunt Virgie, and she had *rich* material in our spiritual walk. And there are some *amazing* stories there I'd like to share maybe a little later.

Then, that took me to a process of: "What's our mission? How are we going to accomplish this vision that the Lord has put in front of us?" I went back to some past experiences from my business life / from my everyday life, and I applied them in this process. From that, we developed what we're calling a "Generational Spiritual Development Plan" for our home.

It's a step-by-step process—the how, the what, and so forth—as to how to lead your kids in the way to the Lord.

Bob: You know, you go back to the very first step—the vision that you asked God to give you for what your family would look like a generation from now. Dennis, I think that's a step that very few parents ever take. I think we're so caught up in the dailyness of just trying to survive parenthood that we don't stop and think about: "What is it that we want this to look like 20 years from now?" and "How do we calibrate what we're doing today so that we can get there in 20 years?"

Dennis: It may expose some misplaced values, Bob; because a lot of parents—when they think about where they want to be with their children in 15/20 years—they picture their son, perhaps, in the NFL, or playing basketball at a college, or a daughter who is a cheerleader / who is doing well in gymnastics—on and on and on.

They're not thinking about being intentional about developing the spiritual growth / the spiritual muscle called "faith" in their children.

Bob: Yes; most parents—when it comes right down to it, Terence—they want their kids to be happily married / have a successful job. They want them to be healthy. They want them to be independent, on their own and *happy*. I mean, if you—

Dennis: Right.

Bob: —summed it all up in one word: "I just want my kids to be happy." And there is nothing wrong with wanting our kids to be happy; but there's more to your vision than just happy kids later on; right?

Terence: Oh, absolutely. I tell you—if we settle on that word, happy, that's a whole other episode; but you know, what it took me to is Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, don't exasperate your child." I was doing a good job of that, by the way—I'd probably get an A+ in that area.

Bob: —in exasperation?

Terence: Yes.

Dennis: In what way? How were you doing that?

Terence: Well, you know, we want to challenge our children—we want the best for them / we want them to achieve. We want that happiness—you know, this generation to do better than our generation; right? We have that deep passion—there's nothing wrong with those types of passions—but one of the ways I was frustrating was—interesting enough, as I got into this, I was becoming the idol for my children. They were looking at me as the model, which some would say: "That's a good thing. You're a good role model. You're setting some good standards."

You know what? That's not this process. We want to point them to *Him*—we want to point them to Jesus Christ—He's the model. He's the Father that's never going to fail them. I'm going to fall short of His glory every time. But where He took me—He says: "Train and instruct them in the *Lord*,"—not train them and instruct them in the world—"but train and instruct them in the Lord."

I looked at that as family discipleship. My role was to be the spiritual leader of this discipleship group that the Lord had naturally given me. I didn't have to go out and develop this discipleship group. I had already developed it through a natural process,

and they—by the way, they couldn't run away. They had to show up every day to the meeting.

So, all we had to do was love on them well.

Dennis: And the concept of discipleship is repetitive training: "Are the parents listening to me right now?" The nature of discipleship is training them over and over and over again in the basics of the faith. That's your assignment, and it's going to become wearisome at times. They may push back and rebel like you did sitting in a corner, refusing to sing; but that doesn't mean a parent is absolved from all responsibility.

That's where I really like what you are saying here, Terence. You're encouraging parents to *seize* the moment, assume their responsibility, and get with the program in training their children spiritually.

Terence: And we need to be intentional in that process. In this process, I've been going all around the world teaching this. I've realized that less than one percent of Christians have an intentional, spiritual development plan for their home—less than one percent. We are a people of planners—we plan vacations / we plan a whole lot of things.

I can simply say to you that our marketers—they know what they want for your children. The internet—they know what they want for your children. Our school systems—they know what they want for your children. The idea is: "Do you have an intentional plan and process to develop your kids in the Lord?"

Bob: Did your children know that something's changed with Dad and things have changed around the house as you were going through this process and starting to get serious about where we're going as a family? Were they kind of like: "Oh, this is not the same Chatmon house that I am used to growing up in"?

Terence: It was so fun the way we kicked this off—I sat back, and I reflected, and I wrote some notes—I didn't have an entire plan in front of me. I took them out to a *fun* place—I took them out to Lake Lanier—some camping grounds up in North Georgia. I said, you know: "Would you guys come join us? We just want to invite you out. We want to have fun together. We're going to play putt-putt golf, and we're just going to have a good time."

Bob: How old were they at this point?

Terence: They were about ten and thirteen at this point. I said, "I just want to share some things with you that are on my heart."

We went up to those Georgia mountains and to the cabin we stayed in. One of the things I wanted to do was share my personal testimony—I wanted them to hear that personal testimony from *me*. Then, my wife shared *her* personal testimony.

Now, I don't know about *you*—when you hear your children's personal testimony—you know, their life before Christ, how they came to Christ, and their life after Christ—it is one of the most *fantastic* stories you've ever heard.

Dennis: Psalm 78, again, reminds us we should explain who God is, give them the testimony of the *truth* about God, and then share your experience of God. Then, listen to this—[verses 6/7] it says, "…that the generation might know, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope on God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments…"

We're talking about a spiritual relay race that begins when a dad and a mom link arms together and say: "We're going to do this from a biblical perspective, and challenge them to get to know Him and fall in love with Him, even as you are.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

FamilyLife's mission is to effectively develop godly families, the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. A key part of our mission includes strengthening marriages and families all around the world. We want to do whatever we can do to bring timeless truth to bare on the challenges you face as you seek to strengthen your family.

You can find out more about FamilyLife by visiting our website FamilyLifeGlobal.com. Again that's FamilyLifeGlobal.com. And while you are there click on the radio button to listen to other *FamilyLife Today* broadcasts. Again that's FamilyLifeGlobal.com.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

FamilyLife: Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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