



Melissa shares twelve qualities that are the key ingredients to building God-honoring homes. She shows us why, though inconvenient at times, it's necessary to encourage and infuse traits in our children and reveals how we unknowingly discourage these qualities. Each chapter concludes with practical activities, book recommendations, and discussion questions.

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Chapter 1

What Is Inconvenient Parenting?

To the world, we may have seemed to have it all. We lived in Houston, and John had a great paying job. I was able to stay home with the kids if I wanted. We had the beautiful big house, brand-new cars, private school for the kids, the nanny to help with the babies, the house cleaner, the yard guy, and the open line of credit at the high-end department stores. I could buy all the organic groceries I wanted without ever wondering if we had enough in the bank account to afford it. We could go out to dinner or order takeout any time I didn't feel like cooking. Our life was all about convenience and ease. So why in the world was I asking God to do whatever it took to get my family away from there? I probably sound crazy, right?

If you had asked me then why I prayed those prayers, I would have said it was because I knew God wanted more for our family. While from the outside it may have looked as though we had it all together, I knew that on the inside we were struggling. John was always on the road for work, and we never had time for a family meal. The two older kids were so busy with their schoolwork and outside activities that we were rarely all at the same place at the same time. An attitude of entitlement began to creep into our home, a false belief that money and success were the most important things in life. When one of our children began bragging about his father's invite-only credit card and how he could have a helicopter pick him up from school if he wanted, I knew something had to change. So, I began to pray, "Whatever it takes Lord, remove us from this place!"

God answered those prayers. He took us from Houston in a pretty painful way. But He opened our eyes to a much better life for our family. The world would not say it was better, but *we* know it is. Today, we do not have the luxuries and conveniences we had back in Houston. But we have more family meals together, more family time, a better perspective of what really matters, and a clearer understanding of God's purpose for our family and for each one of us. This purpose is rarely convenient but always worth it.

You may be wondering, what exactly is inconvenient parenting?

A parent who is willing to be inconvenienced is a parent who is willing to do the hard and holy sacrificial work of raising children to reach the potential and purpose God has for them.

Elisabeth Elliot wrote that “the measure of our love is the measure of our willingness to be inconvenienced.”¹ The idea of being inconvenienced is not an easy one. It means sacrifice, giving up what’s easy for what’s better. It’s a willingness to tolerate some messes, messy kitchen tables, and messy conversations. It’s taking the harder, less traveled way knowing that it’s all worth it in the long run. It’s dying to ourselves and putting our family’s needs before our own, at times knowing that the reward of seeing our children become who God created them to be is worth all the effort and inconvenience. That was what I knew God wanted for our family, all those years ago in Houston.

Inconvenient parenting means parents keep the end goal in mind, understanding that the goal of parenting is to equip their children to fulfill the unique purposes and plans God has for each child. Sometimes that means sacrificing short-term comfort for long-term success. That has been our story. It has gotten much less comfortable in our home. Where we had thousands of extra square feet in our old house, we now squeeze into much tighter quarters. But we have richer relationships, many more great conversations, and a lot more laughter.

It wasn’t just giving up of our life in Houston that led to these changes, but a way of igniting our family to reaching its God-given potential. I am

excited to introduce you to the twelve qualities that have impacted our family. When Thomas Armstrong first identified the “qualities of a genius,” he described traits that, when encouraged, unlocked a student’s greatest potential for growth.² The qualities—curiosity, playfulness, imagination, creativity, wonder, wisdom, inventiveness, vitality, sensitivity, flexibility, humor, and joy—were introduced to me by Dr. Kathy in a workshop in which she described ways that homeschool families could integrate them into their school days. Immediately, I resonated with these traits. Many of them—like wisdom, inventiveness, wonder, imagination, and creativity—were qualities I was already trying to instill in our children.

At first, my husband John was oblivious to the changes I was implementing. Our kitchen table was covered with the latest invention or craft project. His mismatched socks were repurposed as doll clothes and sock puppets. He could not understand why I was willing to stop at every tiny thing that caught one of the children’s attention when we would go for family walks in the neighborhood. To him, a crawling caterpillar was not a big deal, but to my daughter, who took notice and wondered how many legs it had and why it was crawling so slowly and where it lived and did I think it had a family, this was an opportunity to experience wonder and curiosity. I tried to explain to John what I was beginning to understand, that these “genius qualities” were really so much more than what Armstrong described as keys to unlocking academic achievement; they were God-given qualities that were helping us to fully embrace our abundant life.

One day our family was on the last leg of a several-hour-long road trip. The two youngest daughters were joyfully and loudly singing

(off-key) a song that they'd made up on the spot. I don't know if you have children who make up songs, but sometimes they can be pretty cute . . . and sometimes they can be pretty annoying. On this particular day, the song was not cute. But as their song continued from the back, I sat up front in the passenger seat, unfazed by their off-tune warbling. I assumed that John was getting ready to tell them to be quiet, to stop singing, or to pick another song.

Instead, he looked at me and said, "I get it. I get why you let them do this. You're allowing them to be creative and musical and imaginative, just the way God created them to be."

Maybe it was his new position as executive director of Celebrate Kids, where he was around Dr. Kathy and her wealth of knowledge about children and raising them to be who God created them to be. Maybe it was my recent excitement over the genius qualities and his front row seat to the change that was taking place in our home. But in that moment, I knew that our family would never be the same; we would always prioritize each of these qualities because we both understood the value it was having in our family, even though John was just beginning to understand how inconvenient it might be at times.

As we drove, I asked him to tell me what other ways he had noticed changes in our home. More messes, more creative projects, more walks to stare at God's creation (especially at sunset, because those are my favorite). He brought up the time I let the kids make a stained-glass painting on the kitchen window and what a hassle it was to remove the tape and paint.

“Isn’t it more work for you, though? More messes to clean up?” he asked. He knew that housecleaning was my least favorite thing.

“Yes. But it’s worth it, don’t you think?” I answered.

“True, but does it have to be so inconvenient?”

I believe it does. But I also believe you will agree it’s worth it! It may take some extra work, extra supplies to keep around the house, maybe even extra tears from difficult conversations you would rather skip altogether. It will definitely take saying no to good things in order to make time for the best things, and possibly changing your family priorities, although maybe not as drastically as our move from Houston. The sacrifices you make to ignite and nurture these traits will help your children become who God created them to be.

As we explore each of the twelve qualities, I am going to show you why they are necessary and how you can begin to recognize and encourage them in your family. I will also point out some ways that we might inadvertently discourage them and what you can do instead.

I’ll explain from a biblical perspective where I believe Armstrong’s definitions of these qualities fall short. His research and explanations on this topic have been foundational; however, my view of Creator God informs my view that all twelve of these qualities are given to everyone, to differing degrees, in order that we may fully engage with God and the world He created, so that we are able to fulfill the purposes He has for each of us.

Are you ready to dive into the qualities and learn how your family can benefit from them, like we did? I am excited for you to find your unique ways to incorporate these for your children’s benefit. I will share

WHAT IS INCONVENIENT PARENTING?

ideas of what worked for us and for others, but remember, you are the one God chose to parent your children, and you are the one best equipped to decide what will work in your home. I hope you are ready to get a little inconvenienced for the good of your kids!

Chapter 2

Wisdom

Close your eyes and imagine your children five, ten, twenty years from now. Picture their sweet little faces maturing into adulthood. Envision how much taller they've grown. Dream, for a moment, about their future spouses, future children, and your grandchildren. How will they parent? Will they grow up to love God and embrace who He created them to be? Will they know how to discern between truth and almost truth? Will they be wise?

While we don't have much control over how tall our children will become or how much facial hair they may grow or how many children they may have, we do have influence over how wise they become.

Wisdom is foundational to everything else that will follow in this book. I believe that wisdom is more precious than jewels and nothing that we desire for our children compares.¹ Charles Spurgeon preached that "wisdom is man's true path—that which enables him to accomplish best the end of his being, and which, therefore, gives to him the richest

enjoyment, and the fullest play for all his powers.”² Isn’t that what we want for our children?

If we agree that we want our children to accomplish their purposes and enjoy this full, abundant life, then the path of wisdom is the way. But what do I mean by wisdom?

WHAT IS WISDOM?

If you look up the definition of wisdom, you will find different meanings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines wisdom as the “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct.”³ *Merriam-Webster* defines wisdom as an “ability to discern inner qualities and relationships,” “insight,” “good sense,” or “judgment.”⁴ And Dictionary.com defines it as “the quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action.”⁵ Thomas Armstrong defines wisdom as experiencing wonder of the world directly, without a filter. Armstrong saw wisdom as an eyes-wide-open receptiveness to the world.⁶ And this is observable in childhood.

Have you ever taken a young child to a fair, a park, or a beach and watched as they stare wide-eyed, their mouths slightly open, soaking in everything? By adulthood, we seem to become immune to the everyday wonders around us; but childhood is a period of rapid brain development. Much neurobiological research over the past twenty years supports the idea that early childhood experiences influence brain growth.⁷ This is exactly the way God created us to function. And God knew way back at creation that as He shaped humanity with this drive toward

experiences, it is the first step toward learning new things. But is that all wisdom is?

Each of these definitions highlight aspects of wisdom, which include experience, knowledge, discernment, and judgment. I call this human wisdom. This wisdom has its place as it helps us navigate the world with knowledge and understanding. Christians, however, believe that ultimate wisdom comes from God.

John Piper, in his sermon “How to Get Wisdom,” differentiates between human wisdom and God’s wisdom. He explains that human wisdom is factual knowledge, situational insight, and necessary resolve. These encompass the traditional definitions of wisdom, but only God’s wisdom is infallible.⁸ I think it’s important to make this distinction. Human wisdom is beneficial for our children, but God’s wisdom should be our ultimate goal. This is why, while I appreciate Armstrong’s definition, we must broaden our view of wisdom.

If our goal for our child is to simply learn new information and understand how to properly apply that wisdom, then we would only be tapping into the world’s understanding of wisdom. Our goal must be for them to grow in understanding so that they may live with good judgment and discernment. But who defines “good judgment”? If we are not seeking God’s wisdom directly from His Word, then “good” becomes relative to opinion and culture. I want my children going to the source of unchanging wisdom to define what is good.

In today’s culture of fake news and easy access to whatever society calls “truth,” our kids must discern actual truth, and wisely apply that truth to their lives. This type of wisdom starts with an understanding

of the inerrancy of God's truth. This is the heart of godly wisdom, to discern what God says is true and apply it properly.

How do we teach wisdom to our kids?

Wisdom starts with humility. We must first admit that we need help because we don't possess wisdom within ourselves. We must be willing to be a student, desiring to learn and grow in knowledge. We never get to a place where we have learned everything we need to know, right? Modeling this type of humility to our children is an important first step.

We must hunger for knowing more about the world around us, and especially God's Word. Do you have a hobby, or have you learned a new skill? Is there a Bible study that you have enjoyed lately? Have you demonstrated to your kids that you desire to keep learning and growing, or are you content believing that you already know everything you need to know? If you're reading this book, then you are demonstrating a desire to learn and to grow. That's a great example to your kids!

I learned in the last ten years how to crochet. My children witnessed my frustrating beginning and pitiful first attempts at scarves and baby blankets. But they also witnessed me grow and develop in my ability, mostly through seeking more experienced friends who helped me along the way. Also, thanks to YouTube, I was able to teach myself some new crocheting skills. I hope my kids understand that this mom still has a lot to learn, and I am humbly willing to admit that and willing to put in the time and effort to continue to learn.

For you, it may not be crocheting; it could be birdwatching, tennis, or even the history of ancient Egypt that you're learning alongside your kids

as they study. As a homeschool mom, I get a lot of opportunities to say, “I don’t know, let’s research that!” My family is not under any delusion that I know everything, but they do know that what I don’t know, I can learn. More is caught than taught, and if we demonstrate an ongoing interest in learning, our kids will catch the excitement for learning too.

Ultimately, we want our children to see us going to the source of all wisdom. They need to see us seeking God’s Word for wisdom and direction. They need to hear us talk about what God is teaching us because we must never stop learning and growing, especially when it comes to the living and active Word of God. If we desire our children to seek godly wisdom above all, then they must see us doing that as well.

Maybe that means you occasionally include your children in your time of Scripture study. It may be more convenient to do your studying in private—trust me, I love my quiet time alone, but modeling this habit before your family, no matter how noisy it may be, helps them see the value that you place on God’s Word.

But we cannot simply stop at showing our children the importance of learning new things. That is only the first step toward wisdom. They must also see us seeking to apply that knowledge with discernment. They need to see us taking what we are learning in God’s Word and applying it in our daily lives. They need to hear us talking about relying on the Holy Spirit for discernment and praying for strength to implement whatever God is asking us to change. No matter the age of your children, they will benefit from seeing a parent who humbly seeks God for truth and then shares about the ways they are applying that truth! This is true wisdom!

How do we empower our children to seek out truth?

The first step is to become students of our kids and discover how they learn best. In her book *8 Great Smarts*,⁹ Dr. Kathy describes the eight ways children learn. She calls these different learning styles their “smarts” because it describes the natural way that they are wired to receive information. Some children are music smart and love listening to different genres of music or using instruments from other cultures—these children will be inspired to learn in musical ways. Another child will thrive outside in nature—being surrounded by creation, and therefore an outdoor environment, makes learning more engaging for them. Our job as parents is to figure out how they are wired to encourage their unique style of learning. When we understand how our children are created uniquely it becomes much easier to create settings for learning.

Another great step in helping our children become wise is to introduce them to various ideas and information. Charlotte Mason, a pioneer in early childhood education in the 1900s, believed that a child’s mind was just as hungry as their stomach and that a parent’s job is to provide variety for them to feast on.¹⁰ This feasting will look different depending on the stage of your child’s development.

When our children are babies, we can provide visually stimulating environments, talk to them often, play music, and read picture books to them. Elementary-age children are eager to learn new things; for parents, this is an ideal time to capitalize on this desire. Read engaging stories, find out what they are interested in, and learn about it together. We went through a period where one child was fascinated by the *Titanic*. We read books, studied the history of the era, and watched documentaries. These

activities reinforce the message that in our home, when we are interested in a topic, we will study about it together!

This is also the perfect time to help your children learn how to identify reputable sources of information. Wisdom is not just the gathering of facts but involves discerning where to go for that information and what to do with that knowledge. This is something we must intentionally teach our children.

By the teenage years and into young adulthood, children should understand where to go for reputable truth and scholarly sources. Hopefully by this point, they understand the value of God's Word and its infallibility. We must help them develop a biblical worldview that stands firm on the unchanging Word of God. Once their worldview is firm, it is time to encourage studying a variety of cultures and viewpoints that don't necessarily align with their worldview. Invite people of different cultures and views into your home and learn more about them. Help your teen learn how to think critically about current events. They must be able to defend their faith, so introducing apologetics is helpful. Encourage your young teen to travel. Mission trips are a great way to see that the world is so much bigger than they realized. Even if your family can't physically go anywhere, there are boundless resources that can transport us to foreign lands. The point is to help our children value understanding and insight.

It seems so simple, right? Just model a love of learning, expose them to lots of valuable information to feast on, help them develop a strong biblical worldview that filters all things through the lens of Scripture, and they will be wise. Okay, maybe that doesn't sound simple, but it is doable. So why aren't we as Christian parents doing a better job of this?

(I'm looking in the mirror when I ask this.) May I gently suggest that while we have the best of intentions, we let lesser things distract us?

What gets in the way of wisdom?

Laying out a feast of information for our children takes intentionality and time. We can have the best of intentions, but if we don't prioritize time with our children, we won't be able to influence them toward wisdom. Whether you chose to educate at home, public school, or private school, parents are the primary influencers of education, especially in the early years. But if our schedules are so jam-packed with activities, then we won't be able to impact our families.

Modeling humility, prioritizing God's Word, providing exposure to new ideas and cultures—it all takes intention and presence. I told you up front that this type of parenting will be inconvenient. It is sacrificial to clear our schedules; to lay down what we want to do so that we can do what we need to do. I don't always want to read a book about the *Titanic* for the sixteenth time with my child instead of watching my favorite show, but I do it. Are there things that you can lay down in order to show up?

Could it be your family's dependence on technology that eats away at your quality time?

Technology has given us all access to a lot of information, but also makes us all more selfish. We spend time on our devices playing what we want, looking up articles that we want to read, and reinforcing the false belief that we are "the center of [our] own universe."¹¹ We will talk a lot about the dangers of technology, but right now I want you to think about your own technology use. Do you choose the immediate

satisfaction of scrolling on social media instead of sitting in silence and being available to your child? Do your children go into their own rooms, with their own devices, to watch their preferred entertainment? We all do this from time to time, but what if we chose instead to spend that time together? What if we read a book together as a family or watched a documentary on a topic of interest and then talked about it? What if we studied God's Word together and shared how the Holy Spirit was working in our lives? This is what inconvenient parenting looks like. This is how we are intentional about pointing our children toward wisdom.

In addition to creating an environment that supports quality time, parents must also provide a safe place for children to learn from their mistakes. Sometimes opportunities to apply knowledge in real-world ways can lead to mistakes, and mistakes are some of the best teachers. But how often do we get frustrated by our children's mistakes? As a recovering perfectionist, this is an area I struggle with! Thankfully, I have had wonderful mentors in my life who have helped me to find the growth that comes from making mistakes.

My girls are always in the kitchen trying new recipes. And that always provides opportunities to learn. On one particular day, they decided following a recipe was unnecessary. And much to everyone's shock, the masterpiece didn't turn out how they expected. They learned a valuable lesson in the importance of following the recipe, especially when it comes to baking. Now, I could have gotten frustrated with them for wasting ingredients and making the house smell like burned pancakes, and to be honest, in the past that is what I would've done. But instead, I

saw this mistake as a chance to talk about wisdom and why it is important to listen to those who know more than we do.

Our kids are going to mess up. As parents, we have to allow room for our children to experience the impact of those mistakes in the safety of our homes, so that they grow in wisdom and understanding. Someday they will leave our homes, and if they have not learned the importance of wisdom, the consequences of their actions could be severe.

We want our kids to value wisdom throughout their lives—both man’s wisdom and especially God’s wisdom. So, let’s prioritize wisdom, model to our kids how vital it is to never stop learning, never stop experiencing new and challenging things, and give them space to put that knowledge into practice. It won’t be easy, but it will definitely be worth it!

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