

AREN'T THEY
LOVELY WHEN
THEY'RE
ASLEEP!

'Ann Benton brings a wealth of Biblical wisdom, as well as a great deal of sound common sense to this subject. God's unchanging Word is applied skillfully to the issues which challenge us as parents today. Over the past years I have learned a great deal from Ann's seminars on parenting, and also from her example as a mother. I am delighted that she has written this book, and would commend it warmly, especially to new parents.'

**Sharon James,
Author and Conference Speaker**

'A welcome and stimulating addition to contemporary literature on Christian parenting. The book is full of biblical wisdom and arranged in six lessons. It is honest, practical, readable and stimulating. Ann's book helps parents to take the long view of parenting. What are we doing? We are growing adults! In taking this approach we are encouraged to look at the consequences of particular practices or strategies all too common today. Christian parents will be challenged and helped by the practical advice on family prayers in lesson six. This book will not give all the answers when it comes to parenting today, but it will give you godly guidance.'

**Sheila M. Stephen,
Counsellor and Parenting Trainer**

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Lessons in unsentimental
parenting

Ann Benton

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS

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Dedication

This book is affectionately dedicated to Matthew, Tom, Jessica and Owen, who have borne with the foolish and frequently sinful idiosyncrasies of their mother with a commendable amount of grace, patience and cheerfulness.

Semper Reformanda
(Always Being Changed)

Introduction

Before we start...

On the grey January day in 1976 that John and I brought our firstborn home from hospital, we looked at each other and sucked in our breath as the weight of responsibility began to descend. Nothing had prepared us for what was to come: not a degree in developmental psychology nor a number of years teaching. I was a new mother and I wanted to get it right. In those early weeks and months I was inundated with advice, much of it conflicting, from professionals, old-hands or even from novices like myself. Living as we did, in the North of England where people talk to complete strangers on the street, I dreaded the onset of infant wails from within the pram as I walked to the local shops.

'He wants a feed, love'

'Put him on his back'

'He's got too many blankets'

'That's a windy cry'

All this well-meaning and cheerfully delivered advice was uttered with such assuredness, that I became completely confused while any confidence I had drained away. My ineptitude was obviously apparent to the whole world.

So, what am I doing writing a book about parenting? I certainly do not want to undermine the confidence of parents. Nobody, apart from God, knows their own child like its parents and

nobody, apart from God, has their child's interests so much at heart. I also do not intend that this book should be a written equivalent of a disinterested stranger giving instant diagnoses at the checkout in Sainsbury's. Parenting is far too complex, that much I know.

Some years ago I was invited to speak on the subject of 'Biblical Motherhood in a Child-Centred Society' and this led me to attempt to get back to first principles, starting from the Maker's instructions. Somewhat to my surprise, people seemed to find the talk I gave helpful and I have repeated the seminar, with minor modifications, many times since. I have no technique to offer and remain deeply suspicious of any book which includes its own testimonials. (Wayne and Sherrill followed the EIEIO strategy and Troy's bedroom is now regularly featured in *Beautiful Homes*.) If you are looking for Lily the Pink's medicinal compound, you will be disappointed.

My main aim in this book is to encourage parents to take responsibility, to examine and evaluate the way they behave, consciously or unconsciously, and where necessary, to make some changes. My authority is not my own experience or practice, but what I find in the word of God. Strangely, experience and practice bears it out! I once gave a couple of seminars

on parenting at the local Primary School. Because of the sensitive setting, I omitted all the Bible references but the substance was the same. 'Where do you get all this stuff from?', asked one admiring parent. She was surprised when I told her. But believers will not be surprised. God's perfect law holds true for everybody. His ways may not always be easy; rarely are they instant; but his ways are best.

The structure of this book is simple. It is based around six instructions: accept, beware, communicate, discipline, evaluate and fear the Lord.

Having thus delivered the health warning, let us commence.