

THE GREAT DETERMINANT RAISING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (K-4)

By Brent E. Wake, MPH

INTRODUCTION

*Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

Proverbs 22:6

I believe that, as fathers, we're all engaged in this battle of trying to raise our children right. We employ different methods using books, messages, our own experiences perhaps even with our own fathers (for good or bad), etc. My hope is to help us put a defined focus and a little more structure to our effort.

As men, we're thought to be rational—to think logically. This morning, I want to appeal to your rational side today to help us employ even logic as we try to raise spiritual children. In a world in which emotion and personal opinion rule the day, I want to ask that we step back and place value in something different as we approach this topic of parenting younger school age children.

What makes some kids spiritually healthy and others unhealthy?

How can we create a family in which everyone has a chance to a thriving spiritually healthy life?

We can explore these questions by:

- Developing objectives that address the relationship between health status and our kids' biology, individual behavior, related ministries, social factors, and our own household policies.
- Emphasizing a parenting approach that understands the multiple facets of our child's life and the interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviors, and for identifying the leverage points at which we can have make the most impact in promoting spiritual health. This is also known as an *ecological approach*. Ecology - the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings.

EXAMPLES

The factors that help to shape or play some role in determining various aspects of our children's psyche and make-up have been and are working:

- The perception that we give our daughters of fairytales and them being princesses will pave the way for weddings that allow them to be princesses (at least for a day) and us paupers for a while afterwards

INDIANAPOLIS CHURCH OF CHRIST

6001 West 52nd Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46254
(P) 317-286-2010
(W) indychurchofchrist.org

- What our kids will perceive as an appropriate number of prison beds and percentage of the population being incarcerated is being determined now, in part, by 3rd grade reading levels
- Our kids' view of the norm of public discourse is being shaped now by all major media outlets—there is no innocent one.

DETERMINANTS

In the field of Public Health, the range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that influence health status are known as *determinants*. Just as there are determinants for the dimensions of health that we might typically think about—social, physical, mental—there are surely determinants for our children's spiritual health. The determinants of health include: the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviors.

- And we get this idea of determinants even though we don't call them that. How many times do we say, "I'm this way because..." Or think back to our previous conversation regarding family of origin.

THE LIST OF DETERMINANTS

I'm going to highlight these determinants in hopes that we are more mindful of them and can address them as relevant in raising our children.

These determinants are at work at a very early age. This morning, I'd like to ask you to consider the broad categories under which the determinants fall under and your importance as a Dad of a school-age child in understanding these and applying intervention where relevant.

- 1) Biology & Genetics – Excitability, Introverted, Extroverted, jokers
 - Do we try to change these characteristics or do we let them be, working with them?
 - Some are more prone to spiritual challenges (Depression, ADHD, being on the autism spectrum)
- 2) Policymaking/Environment – We know about the impact of policies, laws, and regulations outside of our home, but these also consider the sort of policies and the environment you're creating in your home. Are they nurturing to a spiritual life?

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[a] ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk

MANNA IN THE MORNING

along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

- 3) Social factors – Social and physical conditions of the environment in which people are born, live, learn, play, work, and age.
- Race
 - Income
 - School (even think of their school conditions and what they see every day)
 - Friends

1 Kings 12

¹Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king.² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from^[a] Egypt. ³ So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: ⁴ "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

⁵ Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away.

⁶ Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked.

⁷ They replied, "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."

⁸ But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. ⁹ He asked them, "What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us'?"

¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him replied, "These people have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.' Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. ¹¹ My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'

¹² Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, "Come back to me in three days." ¹³ The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, ¹⁴ he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

"What share do we have in David,
what part in Jesse's son?
To your tents, Israel!
Look after your own house, David!"

INDIANAPOLIS CHURCH OF CHRIST

6001 West 52nd Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46254
(P) 317-286-2010
(W) indychurchofchrist.org

So the Israelites went home. ¹⁷ But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

- 4) Health Services – What services are provided for the spiritual health
- 5) Individual Behavior – Who are they, their own character? And what of their actions shape them?

Ezekiel 18:20

²⁰ The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.

- Do your part to guide, but don't take all of the blame

INTERVENTIONS

Again, I believe that we can promote spiritual health by applying an ecological approach—one that considers the dynamic interplay of all of these determinants. I believe that we typically focus on one or only a few of them.

TWO WAYS TO APPROACH THE DETERMINANTS

Upstream Interventions

In Public Health, upstream interventions involve policy approaches that can affect populations through regulation, increased access, or economic incentives. For example, increasing tobacco taxes is an effective method for controlling tobacco-related diseases. While for these purposes, we can be inclined to think that it has to do with how we interact with the government and society for the betterment of our children, I ask you to think of upstream approaches more in terms of the rules of your household.

Think of the words that God had Moses chisel out on the second set of stone tablets in Exodus 34:27 through which God established covenant with Israel. Studying out the commands of God reveals that the rules weren't arbitrary. Many of them had impacts on the spiritual lives of the people.

- What are the rules of your household?
- Are they arbitrary? Can you/Do you articulate *why* to your kids? How strict are you?
- Do you have an environment in which your kids can fall and learn (Ex. School lunch?)

You can't be so loose that your children get so deep into worldly things and worldly ways that they lose sight of God. But you can't be so strict that they grow to resent God because they view your harsh ways as being His harsh ways. There's a delicate balance. Get advice.

Downstream Interventions

Downstream interventions look at the impacts of all of the previously mentioned determinants on your one specific child, and aim to apply strategies that mitigate their negative impacts.

MANNA IN THE MORNING

Proverbs 139:14

*¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

- God treats each of us differently. Why did Paul need a flash of light and three days of blindness, while others seemed to get a cheery call while walking down the street?
- This takes getting to know each child.

STEPS TO INTERVENTION: MAP-IT

1) Mobilize

Consider:

- What is the goal?
- Who do I want to bring involve and why?
- Praying

2) Assess

Consider:

- Who is affected and how?
- What resources do we have?
- What resources do we need?
- Praying

3) Plan

Consider:

- What is our short-term/long-term goal?
- What do we need to do to reach our goal? Who will do it?
- How will we know when we have reached our goal?
- Prayer

4) Implement

Consider:

- Are we following our plan?
- What can we do better?
- Prayer

5) Track

Consider:

- Are we evaluating our work?
- Did we follow the plan?

INDIANAPOLIS CHURCH OF CHRIST

6001 West 52nd Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46254
(P) 317-286-2010
(W) indychurchofchrist.org

- What did we change?
- Did we reach our goal?
- Did we pray?

CONCLUSION

As a father, you can be The Great Determinant of your child's spiritual health by taking the time to be invested and engaged in knowing and serving your whole child. Understand the interrelationships among the factors that help to determine our individual children's and our households' spiritual health. Because of the interplay of determinants, interventions that target multiple determinants are most likely to be effective. Determinants of spiritual health reach beyond the boundaries of traditional spiritual approach. This means that, as fathers, we must go beyond simply regurgitating the Bible. We must be shrewd in how we help our children to adopt the perspective from which everything about this life—our circumstances, our challenges, our opportunities, the state of the world—all point back to God. We have multitude traditional and nontraditional resources that can help us to accomplish this goal (movies, books, nature, people-watching, life experiences, etc.) Moreover, we must impress upon them that a godly filter and biblical principles be applied as they perceive, engage and navigate all of the world's allusions to God. If we can work towards such goals, we will be working towards promoting a spiritually healthy child.

THE GREAT DETERMINANT

RAISING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (K-4)

INSTRUCTIONS

What makes some kids spiritually healthy and others unhealthy? How can we create a family in which everyone has a chance to a thriving spiritually healthy life?

We can explore these questions by:

- Developing objectives that address the relationship between health status and our kids’ biology, individual behavior, related ministries, social factors, and our own household policies.
- Emphasizing a parenting approach that understands the multiple facets of our child’s life and the interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviors, and for identifying the leverage points at which we can have make the most impact in promoting spiritual health.

This worksheet is intended to serve as a follow up exercise and source of discussion for Week 2 of the Manna in the Morning Session focused on raising school-aged children through the 4th grade. Select one of your children for whom you will consider various determinants of social health. Completing this worksheet should require having age-appropriate conversations with your child. It will also require discussions with your spouse, if applicable, to determine agreed upon interventions. If you’re not sure of how to have conversations with your child or spouse, connect with spiritual brothers and sisters in who do this well and can provide advice.

If you have more than one child, it is strongly encouraged that you complete this exercise for each one upon completion of this Manna in the Morning Session.

REMEMBER: As a father, you can be The Great Determinant of your child’s spiritual health by taking the time to be invested and engaged in knowing and serving your while child.

BIOLOGY & GENETICS

- 1) Consider the biological and genetic factors that can impact your child’s disposition and outlook on life. Explain how they do so.

Examples of Biological and Genetic Determinants Include:

- Age
- Sex
- HIV status
- Inherited conditions, such as sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia, and cystic fibrosis
- Carrying the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, which increases risk for breast and ovarian cancer
- Family history of heart disease
- Depression
- Autism

- 2) In what ways have your child's biological and genetic factors affected your child's disposition towards God and Christianity?

POLICYMAKING/ENVIRONMENT

While policies at the local, state, and federal level affect individual spiritual health, so do "policies" within the home and the home environment.

- 3) In what ways have you seen the community (national, state, local) shape your child's disposition and outlook on life for the positive or negative?

- 4) In what ways have external policies infiltrated your home and affected your child's disposition towards God and Christianity?

- 5) Consider the rules/policies of your household. In what ways have they shaped your child's disposition and outlook on life for the positive or negative?

- 6) In what ways have the rules/policies of your household shaped your child's disposition towards God and Christianity?

MANNA IN THE MORNING

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

Social determinants of spiritual health reflect the *social factors* and *physical conditions* of the environment in which people are born, live, learn, play, work, and age.

7) Consider your child's places in social orders (amongst friends and in the home). How have these places impacted your child's disposition and outlook on life?

8) In what ways have social factors and physical conditions affected your child's disposition towards God and Christianity?

SOCIAL FACTORS

- Availability of resources to meet daily needs, such as educational and job opportunities, living wages, or healthful foods
- Social norms and attitudes, such as discrimination
- Exposure to crime, violence, and social disorder, such as the presence of trash
- Social support and social interactions
- Exposure to mass media and emerging technologies, such as the Internet or cell phones
- Socioeconomic conditions, such as concentrated poverty
- Quality schools
- Transportation options
- Public safety
- Residential segregation

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

- Natural environment, such as plants, weather, or climate change
- Built environment, such as buildings or transportation
- Worksites, schools, and recreational settings
- Housing, homes, and neighborhoods
- Exposure to toxic substances and other physical hazards
- Physical barriers, especially for people with disabilities
- Aesthetic elements, such as good lighting, trees, or benches
- Poor health outcomes are often made worse by the interaction between individuals and their social and physical environment.

HEALTH SERVICES

What services are provided for your child’s spiritual health (i.e. youth ministry, church camps, relationships with other Christian families). Both access to spiritual health services and the quality of the services can impact spiritual health. Lack of access, or limited access, to spiritual health services greatly impacts an individual’s spiritual health status. For example, when individuals do not have friends within the church congregation, the likelihood of them participating in ministry activities decreases and they are more likely to delay ministry engagement.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HEALTH SERVICES INCLUDE

- Lack of availability (schedules, opportunities)
- Cost of ministry events
- Limited language access

THESE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HEALTH SERVICES LEAD TO:

- Unmet spiritual health needs
- Delays in spiritual growth
- Inability to cope with challenges in a biblical manner
- Preventable spiritual crises

9) What spiritual health services are you consistently making available to your child?

10) What might you be personally doing/saying, if anything, that communicates devaluation of spiritual health services?

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

Your child’s behavior as an individual also plays a role in spiritual health outcomes. It is perhaps this determinant that tends to be the focus of most parents’ intervention effort.

1 1) Ultimately, your son/daughter is developing into her/his own person. Describe that person.

EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

- Diet
- Physical activity
- Engaging with friends
- Reading the bible

MANNA IN THE MORNING

12) Which of your child’s individual behaviors ARE NOT promoting his/her spiritual health?

13) Which of your child’s individual behaviors ARE promoting his/her spiritual health?

14) Considering the person you described, how might you address the following determinants, as they pertain to your child, in order to promote his/her spiritual health?

- Biology & Genetics _____

- Policymaking/Environment _____

- Social Determinants _____

- Health Services _____

- Individual Behavior _____

