



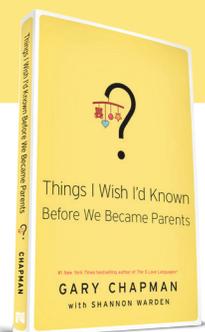
Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Became Parents

A 7-DAY DEVOTIONAL for Parents

DR. SHANNON WARDEN

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This devotional is based on *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Became Parents* by #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, Gary Chapman, and Shannon Warden.



(As featured on the
YouVersion Bible App.)

DAY 1 The Long Days and Short Years

Just as there was a beginning to all of creation, families also have their beginnings. We go from two people to two people with a child. Life is never the same thereafter.

For starters, our days and nights are no longer ours to do with as we please. They are now not only filled with our other responsibilities but also with the joys and challenges

of parenting. And, while the joys are many, the challenges remind us on a daily basis that raising a child is not always so easy.

Our days and nights are no longer ours to do with as we please. They are now filled with the joys and challenges of parenting.

When our firstborn was a toddler, an older mom observed me in a stressful parenting moment. She lovingly said to me, "These are long days and short years. Enjoy them the best you can. You'll wish you could get these times back one day." I knew immediately what she meant by "long days."

Feeding, cleaning, diapering, comforting, playing, entertaining, safety-proofing... parents do these and the many other tasks of parenting numerous times each day. For most of us, this is all pretty draining, even when we've had a "good night's sleep."

God, of course, knew the light was good (Genesis 1:4). We need the light and daytime to accomplish our various duties. And, all-knowing as He is, He also knew we needed the rest of nighttime. Nighttime, for parents, is that amazing time of day when our little ones are tuckered out and sleeping peacefully. After a crazy busy day, they are finally still and quiet. We watch and listen to them breathe, and we thank God for another day with them.

Then, if we're lucky, those precious children of ours sleep through the night (or at least they do so more and more over time). We, too, finally get the rest we've been needing all day.

Yes, these are long days and short years. My husband, Stephen, and I somewhat truth-in-jest tell people, "We go to bed tired, and we wake up tired." But, we wouldn't change a thing. We are so grateful for these three lives that God has entrusted us with. They truly are blessings! 

Today's Verse

On day one of Creation, God made day and night.

- Genesis 1:1-5

Your insights...

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DAY 2 Boundaries are Good for Us and Our Children

Perhaps like me, you have not given much thought to the purpose of the sky. We love its beautiful sunsets and stand in awe of its powerful storms. But, we might otherwise take the sky for granted.

Establishing and maintaining reasonable boundaries is a great way of investing in our children's emotional well-being.

Of course, if pressed, we may remember that the sky actually serves many important purposes. Most importantly, without the sky, we would not be able to breathe.

Thank God that He did not take the sky for granted. He said on day two of Creation, "Let there be an expanse" [the sky] to separate "the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse" (Genesis 1:7).

Imagine that! God essentially said, "Sky will start here and stop there." That's just like Him—establishing order and creating boundaries around us so that we are safe and have what we need.

We as parents can learn at least two lessons from God's handy-work on day two of Creation.

First, God is a God of order and boundaries. We, His children, thrive because of order and boundaries.

Likewise, our children benefit when we establish and maintain order and boundaries at home and in life. This way, they learn when to "start and stop." That is, they learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Second, God doesn't take us or our needs for granted. He is highly concerned not only for our physical and spiritual well-being but also for our emotional well-being. He wants us to have what we need in every aspect of life, and He wants to walk alongside us as we go through life.

We, too, can strive to provide for and protect our children; we also can invest deeply in their well-being, including their emotional well-being. We do this largely through our respectful, loving, and supportive interactions. Establishing and maintaining reasonable boundaries is also a great way of investing in our children's emotional well-being.

How about that?! Sky and boundaries are both life-giving! Sky helps us breathe. Boundaries keep us safe and help us thrive at home and in our relationships. God knows what He's doing! 

Today's Verse

On day two of Creation, God made the sky.

– Genesis 1:6-8

Your insights...

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DAY 3 Education and Apology are Important Parenting Tools

My dad farmed. Early each spring, he plowed the soil to soften it for planting. He then planted various crops in spring and early summer, protected and nurtured them throughout the summer, and harvested them as the summer went along.

These are important tools that greatly shape our children's ability to reach their potential and produce their own "fruit" in life.

Farming is like that—it takes much time and energy, but in the end, we get to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Genesis 1:9-13 makes me think about the similarities of farming and parenting. We as parents want to give our children a firm foundation in life. We "plant" the seeds of relationship, knowledge, and structure in our children's lives, then protect and nurture them as they grow and

begin producing their own "fruit."

Just as farmers need tools, parents need tools to raise our children.

One tool God gives us is education. Parents are responsible for our children's formal education and must make wise decisions about where they go to school. We may choose among public, private, religious-affiliated, and homeschool options. Our careful choices about our children's education can positively influence their on-going development for years to come.

Another tool God gives us is apology. Parents don't always "get it right." We make mistakes and may at times say or do things that can potentially damage our relationship with our children. Recognizing our wrongdoing and humbling ourselves to offer a heartfelt "I'm sorry" can not only strengthen our relationship; this also teaches our children the value of humility and apology.

I know—education and apology don't necessarily have much to do with each other. They do, though, have a lot to do with parenting. They both are important choices (or tools) that greatly shape our children's ability to reach their potential and produce their own "fruit" in life. The prospect of our children doing well in life and in relationships is definitely a worthwhile fruit of our labor! 

Today's Verse

On day three of Creation, God made dry land, vegetation, and plants.

– Genesis 1:9-13

Your insights...

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DAY 4 Our Children are Watching Us

God is omnipresent, which means He is everywhere. Yet, when we need Him, we often look to the sky as if He lives there.

I don't know about you, but parenting causes me to look to the sky a lot! I'm sometimes praying in these moments, "God help me. I'm not sure what to do." At

other times, I'm simply looking up out of frustration and wondering, "Now what?"

God isn't technically "in the sky," but He is above us. He is perfect in all of His ways.

He has seen and sees everything. Following Him is our best chance of successfully making it through life...and parenting!

Interestingly, on day four of Creation, God gave us the sun, moon, and stars to light up the earth (Genesis 1:15) and to "separate the day from the night, and...for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14).

I imagine you agree—we need light to see. We need seasons and calendars (they keep us moving forward). And, we need "signs" from God. These are amazing gifts that lead us in so many important ways.

Children watch us like we watch the sky. They are watching us to see how to respond in life. This fact keeps parents on our toes!

If we're kind, patient, loving, and forgiving, our children are more likely to behave in these same ways. That sounds great, doesn't it?! That's what most parents I know are striving for.

Of course, I don't know any parents who set out wanting to raise unkind, impatient, unloving, and unforgiving children. That's just what can happen over time if we consistently fail to show our children a better way of being.

To be a good guiding "light" in our children's lives, we can turn to God. He made the sky and all that is within it. He made the light and is "the Light." Wherever we look-up to the sky, in Scripture, in our hearts—we find Him there. He is ready, able, and waiting to guide us in everything we face in this life, including the challenging moments we face as parents. 

Our children are watching us to see how we respond in life. This fact keeps parents on our toes!

Today's Verse

On day four of Creation, God made the sun, moon, and stars.

– Genesis 1:14-19

Your insights...

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DAY 5 Good Budgeting and a Little Faith Go a Long Way

The magnificence of Creation easily proves that God is creative and loves mystery and beauty. God, though, is also very practical and knows how to take a little and make a lot.

God demonstrated His practical nature on day five of Creation when He created fish and birds. He then “blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth’” (Genesis 1:22).

Parents also have to think about many practical matters, including buying food, buying clothes, and paying bills. After all, raising children is expensive, and unfortunately for us, God didn't create money trees for us to freely borrow from!

How do we creatively stretch our dollars to cover all the costs of family life?

How do we do it?! How do we creatively stretch our dollars to cover all the costs of family life? This is certainly a common struggle for many parents.

The simple answer is...budgeting. We have to live within our means. And, if we're not living within our means, we have to either make more or spend less money. It's as simple as that.

More than that, though, we have to trust God. He is the Maker of all things and the Master of “multiplication.” He demonstrated this throughout the Bible.

If you're like me, your own family history also proves that God can take a little and make a lot. He always comes through. Even in our hardest moments, He comes through in unexpected ways.

Of course, God doesn't promise us the road will always be easy. I'm reminded of Luke chapter 16's message of good stewardship. Luke 16:10 says, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much...” That's our challenge as parents.

Can we and will we be faithful with what God gives us so that should He bless us with more, we will be faithful with that as well? 

Today's Verse

On day five of Creation, God made the fish and the birds.

- Genesis 1:20-23

Your insights...

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DAY 6 Nurturing Our Marriage Should Be High on Our To-Do List

God created Adam and Eve on day six of Creation and then proceeded to put them to work! He directed them (and you and me) to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

Our spouse is not perfect but is made in God’s image and, because of that, is worthy of love and respect.

Considering their “to-do list,” I suspect that Adam and Eve knew something about the stresses of marriage and parenting. We know for a fact they had communication issues and played the blame game (Genesis 3), which still happens for many of us today.

It seems that a certain amount of marital stress and discord are to be expected. We

are, after all, human.

The problem, however, is not the stress of life; the problem is that we as couples often blame each other for the stress or push each other away during stressful times. The solution is the exact opposite—in stressful times, we can remember that stress is normal and survivable. We also can and should treat each other as if we’re valuable teammates on the same team.

That sounds so easy, doesn’t it?! And, it is, if we humble ourselves and work to tame our prideful tendencies.

With a humble heart and mind, we won’t balk as easily about life’s stresses. We will remember that God charged us with some pretty big responsibilities in this life. We also will remember that, like us, our spouse is not perfect but is made in God’s image and, because of that, is worthy of love and respect.

Beyond choosing to humble ourselves, we as couples need to nurture our marriage. This may mean sending sweet texts, actively listening to each other, going on dates, cuddling, scheduling kid-free getaways when possible, etc. We may even need to schedule time for each other to ensure we actually follow through with our good intentions.

What will you do to nurture your marriage today? Put that higher on your to-do list! 

Today’s Verse

On day six of Creation, God made animals, and He made man and woman.

– Genesis 1:24-31

Your insights...

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DAY 7 God Wants Us to Rest

Children will sometimes say when asked to rest, "But I'm not tired!" Most of us as parents are always tired and glad to rest when we can.

God actually asked us to rest on the last day of each week (the "Sabbath"). He even modeled the value of rest for us when, on day seven of Creation, He Himself rested (Genesis 2:2).

I believe God had the right to rest. For starters, He is God and can do whatever He wants to do. But, look at all He did between days one and six of Creation:

DAY ONE, God created day and night.

DAY TWO, He created the sky.

DAY THREE, He created dry land, vegetation, and plants.

DAY FOUR, He created the sun, moon, and stars.

DAY FIVE, He created the fish and the birds.

DAY SIX, He created animals, and He created man and woman.

That's a busy week!

At the end of our busy weeks, you and I are exhausted. God, though, was not tired on day seven of Creation. He was thinking about our needs. He knew our work would tire us out and that we would need rest.

God also knew a day of reflection and worship would be good for us. Because of this, He blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Genesis 2:3). When you and I honor the Sabbath, we are better able to prepare our hearts and minds for the next week's work.

Of course, it's not just "work" that makes us tired. Family life, itself, takes a lot of time and energy. We have hectic schedules to keep and deadlines to meet. We rush to school, to soccer practice, to ballet, to the grocery store, etc. Oh sure, we know we need to slow it down in life and live one day at a time. But, that's sometimes easier said than done!

Given all our busyness, perhaps it's time to reconsider ours and our families' need for rest. If God can make time for rest, I believe we can, too! 

Today's Verse

**On day seven of Creation,
God rested.**

- Genesis 2:1-3

Your insights...

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SHANNON WARDEN

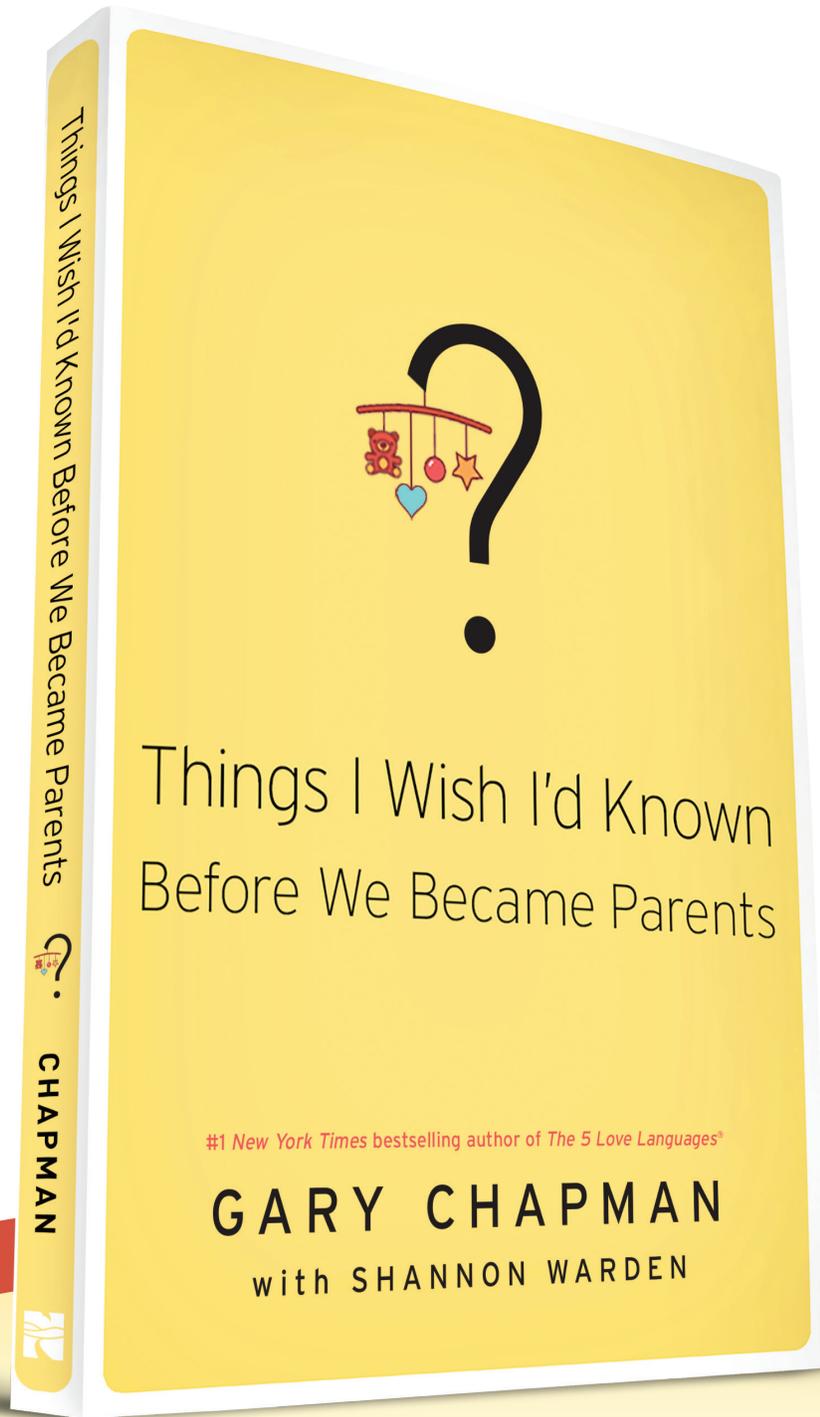
This devotional was written by Dr. Shannon Warden, a busy mom and wife herself, as well as author, teacher, and family counselor. For more information about Shannon and her ministry, visit

www.shannonwarden.com

Has this reading plan helped you better prepare for parenting?

If so, there's more where this came from. Check out *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Became Parents* for more helpful and practical insights from Dr. Shannon Warden and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Dr. Gary Chapman.





Be Prepared for Kids

Inside, Gary shares what he wishes he and his wife had known before having kids. For example: children affect your time, your money, and your marriage—and that's just the beginning. With his trademark warmth, he offers practical advice on everything from potty training to the importance of apologizing to your child to keeping your marriage strong . . . all the while celebrating the great joy that children bring. 

GARY CHAPMAN is a counselor, the bestselling author of *The 5 Love Languages®* series, and the director of Marriage and Family Life Consultants, Inc. He travels the world presenting seminars, and his radio programs air on more than 400 stations.

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