

Raising a  
Daughter  
After God's  
Own Heart

*Elizabeth George*



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## **RAISING A DAUGHTER AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**

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Chapter 1

# The Bell Sheep

## Part 1—Earning Your Bell

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, and with all your strength.  
And these words which I command you today  
shall be in your heart.*

—DEUTERONOMY 6:5

 In a recent Christmas Sunday, my husband, Jim, and I and our family of 14 arrived at a church service extra early to make sure we didn't end up in the "Standing Room Only" section for this special occasion. With my bulletin in hand and several minutes to spare before the service started, I opened my Bible and looked up the Scripture passage the pastor would focus on during his message. Then I read through some additional teaching notes and commentary in the margin of my Bible. One article was entitled "The Bell Sheep."

*The bell sheep? What in the world is that?* I wondered. I read on. The article explained that when a shepherd noticed a sheep who willingly followed him and stayed near him, he hung a bell around the neck of that sheep so the flock would follow the bell sheep...who, in turn, was following the shepherd.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing I would begin writing *Raising a Daughter After God's Own Heart* as soon as the Christmas holiday was over, I almost jumped out of my seat when I read this. I was shouting out in my

mind, "That's it! That's it! A *mom* should be the bell sheep for her daughter!"

And it's true! When we as mothers stay close to Jesus—as close as close can be, and when we love Him with all our heart just the way Jesus said to, and when we willingly follow Him and His Word, guess what? We become His bell sheep for our daughters to follow. Our girls observe—and copy—our behavior. They can—and will—follow our example. We become their very own personal walking, living, real flesh and blood, visual example of what it means to be a child, girl, tween, teen, and woman after God's own heart.

### *How to Be a Bell Sheep...in Three Verses*

Finally Christmas was over, meaning it was D-Day for me—or more accurately, W-Day as in Writing Day. So I sat down to begin and wondered and prayed, "Where does Christian childrearing really begin? And what is Thing 1, Goal 1 for a mom?"

In a few seconds I had the answer! And it came from God's Word. It was packaged in three verses I had discovered as a young mom, and also as a baby Christian. I flashed back on those early new-believer days of excitement, of newness, of need as I hungered to find out for the first time what God teaches about...everything! And especially "What in the world am I supposed to do with two little toddling girls?"

I'm so glad a wise woman had advised me to read in my new Bible every day. Well, the day arrived when I made it to the book of Deuteronomy. And there I hit gold when my eyes landed on Deuteronomy 6:5-7. I was stunned. Amazed. Thrilled! God was actually showing me *His* guidelines for raising my own little daughters, then only one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half years old. And in only three verses! How practical is that? Here's what I read over and over again and finally memorized:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your

children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

I adore these verses because they are packed with clear communication to moms. God goes straight to the heart of the matter—the parent’s heart, the *mom’s* heart. He knows we become what we love. So He is utterly straightforward about where we are to place our love: We are to love Him supremely.

## *Two Questions to Ask Yourself*

Believe me, I thought through this powerful passage—a lot! Then I took it apart word by word and thought by thought. And I came up with two questions I constantly asked my heart during those days with little girls, and still ask even today with two married daughters who are now raising their daughters. (After all, a mom is always a mom!)

### *Heart Question #1: What—and whom—do I love?*

We “love” a lot of things for a lot of different reasons. But God prescribes perimeters and scope for our love. He tells us what *not* to love: “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). And He tells us what we *are* to love and where our love is to be focused—we are to “love the LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

But hold on. The Lord goes a step further and demands *all* of our love. He wants us to love *Him* with every fiber of our being—every breath, every ounce of energy, every thought, every emotion and passion, every choice. He wants us to love Him. He wants us to think first of Him and to desire above all else to please Him. And He wants that love to be intense and total, “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” As writer Matthew Henry summarizes, “He that is our all demands our all.”<sup>2</sup>

Matthew Henry continues on to point out that our love for God is to be a strong one that is lived out with great enthusiasm and fervency of affection. It is to be a love that burns like a sacred fire, a love that causes our every affection to flow toward Him.

Now, apply this information about the strength of this kind of love for God and think about the love you have for your daughter, for your children. I'm sure you've heard others say, "There is no love like a mother's love." And it's true! From the split second we know a baby is on the way, all our thoughts, dreams, prayers, and goals are channeled toward that little one. We are completely consumed and preoccupied by this tiny being. As the baby grows within us, our love blossoms and our commitment to it grows right along with our expanding body.

Immediately we begin to prepare physically for his or her arrival by meticulously taking care of our health. Healthy mom equals healthy baby, we're told. We also prepare physically by setting up a nursery area for the new little addition. A bassinet or crib. A blanket. A mobile. Clothes. Supplies. Loads of diapers! Sometimes we even paint or remodel a room.

*The more you love the Lord, the better you shall love your earthly dearest daughter.*

Then we moms get to work preparing our schedule. Maybe we have to quit a job or arrange for a leave of absence.

Oh, and we have to find a pediatrician, as well as make time for our own doctor appointments. And, if we're smart, we begin to prepare by gathering wisdom and information from our own moms, other moms, and from classes, books, and the Internet.

But as much as we obsess and focus on an approaching child, God wants us to obsess and focus even more on Him. That's because the more we love Him, the more we will know about love. And the more we know about love, the more we will know about how to love. And the more we know about how to love, the more we will love our baby, our child, our daughter. I like what C.S. Lewis wrote about his love for God and how it affected his relationship with his wife: "When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now."<sup>3</sup> Mom, your love for God will prepare you to love your child. The more you love the Lord, the better you shall love your earthly dearest daughter.

So...God's first assignment to any and every mother is to love

Him above all else. If you are a sold-out, on-fire, hot-hearted, committed-to-God woman, you will be infinitely further down the road to being the kind of mom who, by His grace, can raise a daughter after God's own heart. Because all your love centers upon God, and because you follow Him with all your heart, you will qualify to lead your daughter to follow God too—to be...well...God's bell sheep for her.

*Heart Question #2: What's in my heart?*

I don't know what's in your heart, and I'm working on what's in mine! But God tells both of us what is supposed to be there, what He wants to be there. Here it is: He says, "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart" (verse 6).

And here's the scene surrounding these words: In Deuteronomy 6, Moses is in the final weeks of his life. It has been 40 years since God's people left Egypt, 40 years of homeless wanderings in the desert. At last a new generation was poised to enter into the Promised Land. But before they move out, Moses restates the Law one more time to this new generation that had been born in the wilderness. Because this next generation had married and now had—and would have—children, he addresses their spiritual responsibility as parents. As Moses speaks, he doesn't want these moms and dads to merely *hear* the words of the Law and the Ten Commandments. No, he wants more, way more! He wants the words of the Law to go beyond their ears and reside *in their hearts*.

You may want to look again at Deuteronomy 6:6, but it tells us that God's Word, the Bible, is to be *in* our hearts. Other passages in the Bible send us this same message:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night (Joshua 1:8).

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:11).

My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you...bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart (Proverbs 7:1,3).



Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16).

The message is repeated...and loud, isn't it? And clear! God's Word is to be *in* our heart. He asks this of you and me as moms. Why? Because when truth resides in your heart, then you have something to pass on to your daughter. She benefits! And you benefit too: As a mother you have something to guide you when you need help, strength, wisdom, and perseverance in your role as a mom, as a bell sheep. Don't get me wrong—having and raising a child is perhaps the greatest earthly blessing you will ever enjoy. But, at the same time, it is the greatest challenge. But take heart, mom! God's Word will always be there in you, with you, and for you as you guide your daughter in the ways of the Lord.

So...God's second assignment for you as a mom is to be committed to His Word. You are to do whatever it takes to embed the teachings of the Bible in your heart, soul, and mind. As the saying goes, "You cannot impart what you do not possess." The same is true of moms. To teach and guide, lead and raise a daughter after God's own heart presupposes and requires that God's truth be in your heart first. *Then* you possess something to impart. *Then* you have the most important thing to pass on to your precious daughter—the truth about God and the grace He extends through His Son, Jesus.

## *Becoming the Bell Sheep*

I hope your heart is responding fervently to our initial glimpse at this primary role in the life of a mom after God's own heart—that of being your daughter's very own bell sheep. But maybe you are feeling like you need a little help. Well, read on to find out *how* to become the bell sheep. Practical help is on the way!