A CALL FOR THE ROUTINE

You might be asking, “Does my home need structure?” I think so. Let me explain.

You might know by now that I’m a father of eight. I’m blessed and grateful. However, eight children highlight the need for organization. A household this size can easily devolve into chaos. You could say that I’m living in an extreme situation and you might be right. But I think that even smaller families stand to benefit from simple routines.

If you’ve been a parent for more than an hour, you probably know that children cry a lot. Wise parents pay attention to the cries of their children. Your baby is communicating with you through its tears. Your job is to serve your baby in the best possible way. One of those methods of serving is building a healthy routine.

Happy homes are successful homes, and an imperfect routine could be a minor hiccup that destroys the atmosphere of your home. For example, you might be a nearly perfect parent but if your children are constantly tired, your home will suffer. Your tired children will cry over minor issues, which creates frustrated parents and a chaotic home. A simple fix could be a consistent structure. Your eleven-year-old might need eleven hours of sleep each night. And not all bedtimes are equal. Maybe it works best if your child goes to bed at nine every night. This simple routine could transform your house from mostly grouchy to mostly cheerful.

Don’t let me oversell routines. They won’t fix everything. They are simple things that can make a big difference if all the fundamentals are in place. For example, a parent with unchecked anger will never fix the devastating effects of anger with a routine. A schedule can never take the place of love, patience and repentance.

But schedules do provide structure and that structure gives your children a sense of security. Schedules create norms and expectations. They provide a baseline from which children can operate. Once they know where the baseline is, their curiosity can push them off into new areas of exploration. This sense of regularity could provide the freedom that your children need to overcome boredom.

An insecure child may struggle to settle into his play. He may be distracted by worry and fear, feeling a constant need to be near his parents. This can create a cycle of decline. Parents become frustrated by a high-maintenance child, and the child becomes more insecure with each burst of frustration from his parents.

Are routines easy to build?

In one sense, yes. They are simple. Children don’t need elaborate schedules. However, routines, by definition, take a lot of time investment from Mom and Dad.

For example, I’ve found it very helpful for both parents to start the day with their children. Morning is so crucial for helping to set the tone for the rest of the day. Fortunately, well-rested children are

typically about as cheerful as they will ever be. So, if mornings begin without warmth, connection, or clear expectations, some children may start the day feeling unsettled rather than secure. A cheerful, predictable morning routine can help them begin the day with confidence.

I don't naturally build routines. My personality tends toward a more freewheeling schedule. My wife has picked up so many of the "loose ends" in our home. She is the one who wakes the children up at seven every morning when I would be tempted to let them sleep until eight. She is the one that has breakfast on the table at 7:15.

I'm giving you these examples because I want to highlight the beautiful way that both parents can work together to create this structure. I'm much more sensitive about smoothing out the morning for the children. She is much more intent on keeping up with the clock. Both instincts are needed, and my wife and I strive to work together to create a well-rounded atmosphere.

What are some practical examples of routines and their benefits?

Do you struggle to know what to feed your children? Maybe pizza every Saturday night and scrambled eggs every Sunday morning can eliminate some stress out of your life. Another benefit is that even your young children can get a sense for the length of a week. Time feels unmeasurable to young minds. But if the next time they go to Grandpa's is "after pizza night," or some other regular event, they might be able to sense the amount of time required.

To raise godly children, you will need to set up regular Bible teaching. Daily devotions, regular church attendance, Sunday schools, Bible school programs and other godly instructions provide an invaluable baseline for your children's developing faith. Also, moral habits and courtesy should be ingrained in every step of your routines. Requiring a "please" or "thank you" helps to set a godly tone in your home.

Regular chores and tasks provide a sense of belonging and worth and start the process of maturity. A chart that lists out the jobs assigned to each child can set expectations and cut out much of the complaining that young children are tempted with. Dishes need to be washed. Toys need to be put away. The list could be long: beds made, floors swept, garbage emptied, and much more. These minor tasks are the vital beginnings of a disciplined life. And how will a child mature unless he learns the regularity of faithful discipline?

Every good home is a finely tuned balance between kind-hearted warmth and routine structures. The Bible says, "*Let all things be done decently and in order*" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Your child can thrive as he rests in the simple joy of a well-defined world.

~Caleb Martin

"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.
For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:
happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.
Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house:
thy children like olive plants round about thy table.
Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord."
Psalm 128:1-4