



## Installing Windows: Developing Your Family's Vision

BY KAREN LEMBO

**Can you imagine living in a house without windows?** Unfortunately, many Christian homes are not equipped with the kind of "windows" that offer families adequate views of the world just beyond our doorsteps. Well-intended efforts to provide our children with the best opportunities can inadvertently result in overloaded schedules or self-centered rather than sacrificial lifestyles. Parents intending to shelter their children from contemporary culture are often tempted to pull the drapes and lock the doors to the outside world. It's no wonder that many of today's Christian youth wander aimlessly, without a clear sense of vision or purpose.

Windows flood our homes with light and remind us that there's a whole world out there just beyond our doorsteps. Wise Christian homebuilders install many "windows" to help our families see opportunities to serve those who are hungry for the good news of the gospel. We may not realize it, but simple gestures, when offered intentionally, can have a life-altering impact on the development of our children's vision. By effectively installing these "windows," we show our families that our homes serve a greater purpose; we are created to display God's love to a hurting world and to lead others

closer to the heart of God. Along with providing our children adequate shelter to weather life's storms, we must also help them discover their God-intended purpose and their special gifts endowed by God to bring his purposes to fruition.

### Setting the Pace

You know the saying "Monkey see, monkey do"? Those four words pretty much sum up parenting for me! Paul understood this when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Children learn far more by our example than by our words. If we want our children to care more about others, we must regularly serve, give generously, and offer hospitality to others. In order to be most effective, this needs to happen year round, not just at the holidays or during special church activities. When our children see us living sacrificially in order to serve and bless others, they will adopt the same values. Conversely, if we're too busy to serve, or too financially undisciplined to give generously, our children will fail to see the blessing of serving and giving sacrificially. In order to train up children with hearts for ministry, we must be willing to set the pace.



## Providing Opportunities

In order to counter their human tendency toward selfishness, children need parents to guide them into specific acts of service, training them intentionally to see others' needs. We can help install "windows" for even the youngest children by giving them simple household responsibilities, such as cleaning up their toys and helping clean up the kitchen. By capitalizing on preschoolers' desire to help, parents set the stage for increasing responsibilities as children grow. As they mature, their schedules tend to fill up quickly. It is important that parents help their children be selective in choosing activities, remembering to reserve time for service. Families can serve together in church and in their communities and even participate in various mission projects. When we train our children to serve in such simple ways as holding a door or offering a smile and a kind word to a stranger, we begin to instill vision and reveal the joy of maintaining a servant's heart.

## Encouraging Generosity

Do your children love to share? While they may not be as willing to share with one another, many children are naturally inclined to share with those in need. Paul told Timothy to "Command those who are rich in this present world . . . to be generous and willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:17-18). As parents, we must be on the lookout for ways to help our children be generous with their own money and possessions. My husband and I have regularly given our children allowances in order to allow them the opportunity to save, to spend wisely, and to give generously. We have thus encouraged our kids to use their own money to tithe regularly and to purchase donations for mission projects, such as local food and toy drives and Christmas shoebox gifts. One of the best ways to install "windows" is to allow children to experience the joy of giving generously to causes they themselves deem to be important.

## Discovering Gifts

During the installation process, "windows" can help our children begin to see their unique design and giftedness. As Peter said, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others" (1 Peter 4:10). Pastor Rick Warren introduced millions of readers to the concept of discovering their God-given SHAPE (spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences) (Warren, 2002) in order to carry out God's purposes. As children begin to serve, we need to be on the lookout for these qualities and initiate age-appropriate discussions with them, pointing them toward self-discovery of their SHAPE. Christian service is a great vehicle for discovering our specific purpose and calling. For example, my oldest daughter was given opportunities at a young age to help foreign classmates acclimate to their new school and language. Eventually, as a junior in high school, she began to realize that she had a special aptitude for working with speakers of other languages, which led to two mission trips and a major in TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages). Gaining this sense of purpose and vision has been vital in helping our daughter avoid typical teen tempta-

## Custom Windows: Tips for Installation

Let's get those juices flowing! These are just a few ways you can install "windows" in your family's home. Customize these ideas to suit the unique design of your family:

1. Bring your children to serve with you at a local soup kitchen or food pantry. Call ahead to see whether children are allowed and what jobs are available, such as sorting canned goods or loading bags of food.
2. Sponsor a child through an agency such as World Vision or Compassion International. Post your sponsored child's photo and pray regularly for him or her. Encourage your children to correspond regularly with your sponsored child.
3. Find ways to plug in your children to service at your local church. Depending on their age, children may be able to be a nursery or church school helper, assist with AV equipment, or participate on a worship team.
4. Consider making various service projects a part of your holiday traditions. For example, our family has packed Christmas shoebox gifts for Samaritan's Purse and served meals to the homeless as part of our holiday traditions.
5. Pray for world missions, and support missionaries. As God leads, consider taking at least one mission trip in order to expose your children to the needs of those beyond your comfort zone. As you are able, also consider hosting international friends for meals and holiday traditions in your home.
6. Why not sit down with your family this weekend and discuss ways in which you can begin installing custom windows in your home? Choose something from this list and solicit your children's ideas. The more they are included in the planning, the more enthusiastic they will be!



tions while charting a successful course toward her future career and ministry.

### Practicing Hospitality

I think of hospitality as "doing missions from home." And I would assert that there is no greater opportunity to model Christ's example of love than within the context of a genuine Christian family. Jesus told his disciples, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Sure, we fight and the house is a mess. Sure, we don't all cook well. But why should that stop us? We don't have to be perfect to let others in on the transforming work taking place in our families.

The love of Christ is addictive and intoxicating. People want to be around loving Christian families. When they see that love in action, they want to know how they can get in on it too: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Unfortunately, we don't live in a hospitable generation. Did you know that only about a third of Americans entertain friends or family in their homes at least once a year? (Bronson, 2006). So let me give you a hint: in order to have people over, we have to be home sometimes! This, too, might be a bit costly, but I assure you that there is no better way to ignite your children's passion for people than to have a home that is welcoming and regularly filled with friends and fun.

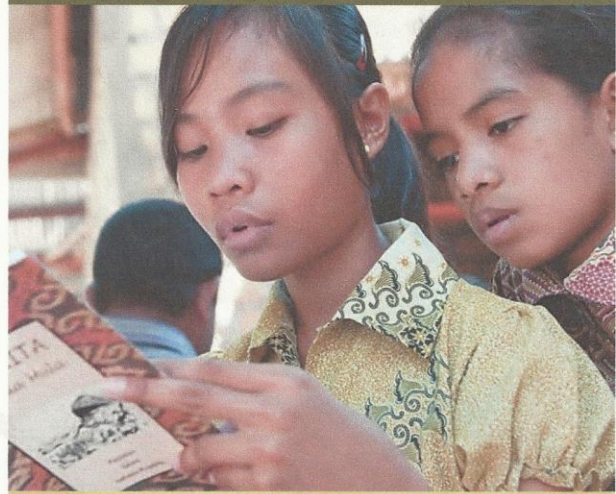
There's nothing more satisfying to Christian parents than to see their children growing up with hearts passionate about serving others in Jesus' name. By setting the pace and offering opportunities to give and to serve, we help our children grow increasingly excited about their potential as they look on the needs of the hurting world around them.

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# God's love is . . .



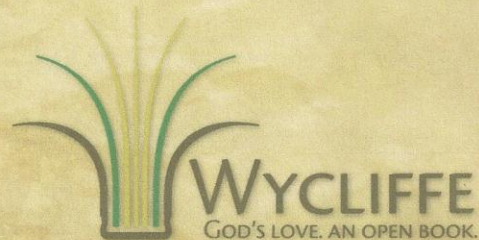
. . . girls in Asia, eagerly learning to read and write in their heart language, opening the doorway to a new world of educational opportunities.

### Free Downloadable Resources.

Are you looking for new and interesting ways to teach children about missions, or help them explore the fascinating world of Bible translation? Maybe you want to encourage children to make a difference for God's kingdom right now. If any or all of these thoughts reflect your interests, we want to assist you!

Wycliffe Bible Translators offers projects, learning experiences and other free resources at <[edu.wycliffe.ca](http://edu.wycliffe.ca)>.

If you have requests, questions or comments, please email us at <[childrens\\_ministry@wycliffe.ca](mailto:childrens_ministry@wycliffe.ca)>.



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