

Parents: Vocabulary Words to Deploy in Hard Times

When I share with parents how best to support young learners, I point to the brain's preference for routine, consistency, and predictability. COVID-19 challenges continue to disrupt school and work habits for children and parents alike. Routine: gone! New work-at-home and teach-at-home responsibilities trump our efforts at consistency. Truly, the only consistent element in life right now is the lack of predictability. Our children, once described as learning sponges, are now anxiety absorbers.

What can parents do to mitigate the impact of these disruptions to their children's educational and emotional equilibriums? Consider afresh the power of words. Construct a small but mighty vocabulary list to strengthen minds and hearts. Take worry head-on, then introduce a few antithesis words such as: **sustain, refuge, steadfast**, and for extra-credit, **immutable!** This list unites large, Biblical truths with words that encourage, hope, and comfort. Within the challenges of uncertain times reside built-in opportunities to create a spiritual vocabulary of promise and praise. And with that vocabulary then develops a statement of faith for ourselves and our children.

Begin by naming, but not claiming, the new resident in so many minds and hearts: *worry*. Research from social sciences and pediatric sources encourages parents and educators to help children verbalize their feelings. Identifying and naming a problem can be the first step in diffusing its hold on an individual. So, let's admit it, we are worried and our children are worried.

Jesus knew that His disciples would worry. There are fifteen references to worry (depending on the translation) in the Bible. In ten of the verses "do not" precedes the verb "worry". Do not worry about food, drink, body, clothes, or life. Jesus' instruction acknowledges the elements of everyday life, where worry can abound. But He asks us to consider:

"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"(Matthew 6:27)

Activity Idea: take a mason jar and write "Worry-Free" on the outside. Fill with Scripture promises focused on 'hope'. When worry appears, let your child dictate a concern on a colored piece of paper. Place the written worry in the jar and pull out a verse of hope. Every so often review the 'worry' and acknowledge how it did not come to pass or was solved.

We acknowledge that worry is present, but we place it with the Lord, as David did:

**"Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken."
(Psalm 55:22)**

Our children need to know that God promises to support, relieve and strengthen them; that is what *sustain* means.

Activity Idea: Color over your worries. Both Pinterest and Google images offer activity pages based on specific Scriptures. You can color, connect the dots, and word search for a host of Bible promises. Join your children in voicing (and coloring) trust in God's ability to handle what seems unmanageable.

There is even a sweet promise for grandparents:

Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (Isaiah 46:4)

It is difficult to escape the daily newsfeed of peaking positives, curves that will not flatten and actions by a few that astound the many. We long for an escape from the news. Our children long for updates not yet given. What an opportunity to introduce our little ones to the great First-Responder. Our Heavenly Father offers shelter, indeed, *refuge*, for our aching hearts.

There are word pictures to help young learners:

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (Psalm 91:4)

Or, proclamations to recite:

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm, and a shadow from the heat. (Isaiah 25:4)

And honest feelings to express;

Trust in him at all times, you people, pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. (Psalm 62:8)

*Activity Idea: create a special space (in a child's bedroom or the family room) with pillows, special books, and comfort items. Refer to that as your child's refuge, so they can picture a **place** as a refuge as well as a feeling.*

Current events may steal consistency from our daily living, leaving us feeling like victims in a narrative in which we have no say. Counselors, however, remind us that feelings follow actions. We can impact the narrative, through a declarative!

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you. (Isaiah 26:3)

It is not network announcements but Psalmist pronouncements that can soothe a child's aching heart:

They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting the Lord. (Psalm 112:7)

As we pray together, we provide our children with spiritual strength:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

Activity idea: read stories of individuals who display steadfastness, such as young Daniel, Naomi, Paul, biographies of explorers, or inventors like Thomas Edison who did not let challenge interfere with purpose!

Lastly, in our powerhouse vocabulary, introduce a compound word with a solitary concept. Their Heavenly Father, Chief Counselor, faithful First Responder, and Divine Helper, is *immutable*, unchanging. Jesus Christ,

"...the same yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

Changes, uncertainty, fears, and disappointments are attributes not limited to a pandemic. They are often unwelcomed neighbors, moving in and out of our life plans. Our brains and our hearts long for routine, consistency, and predictability. Our familiar 'delivery systems' to bring those to our children are limited, but our Deliver is not. Biblical concepts, once thought to be too abstract to convey to our children, have meaning in the circumstances of now. The Word of God, His vocabulary, is "alive and active" (Hebrews 4:12.) Remind your children of the sustaining, steadfast, immutable love of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our refuge. This can be the an opportunity for word growth or, more importantly, growth in the Word.