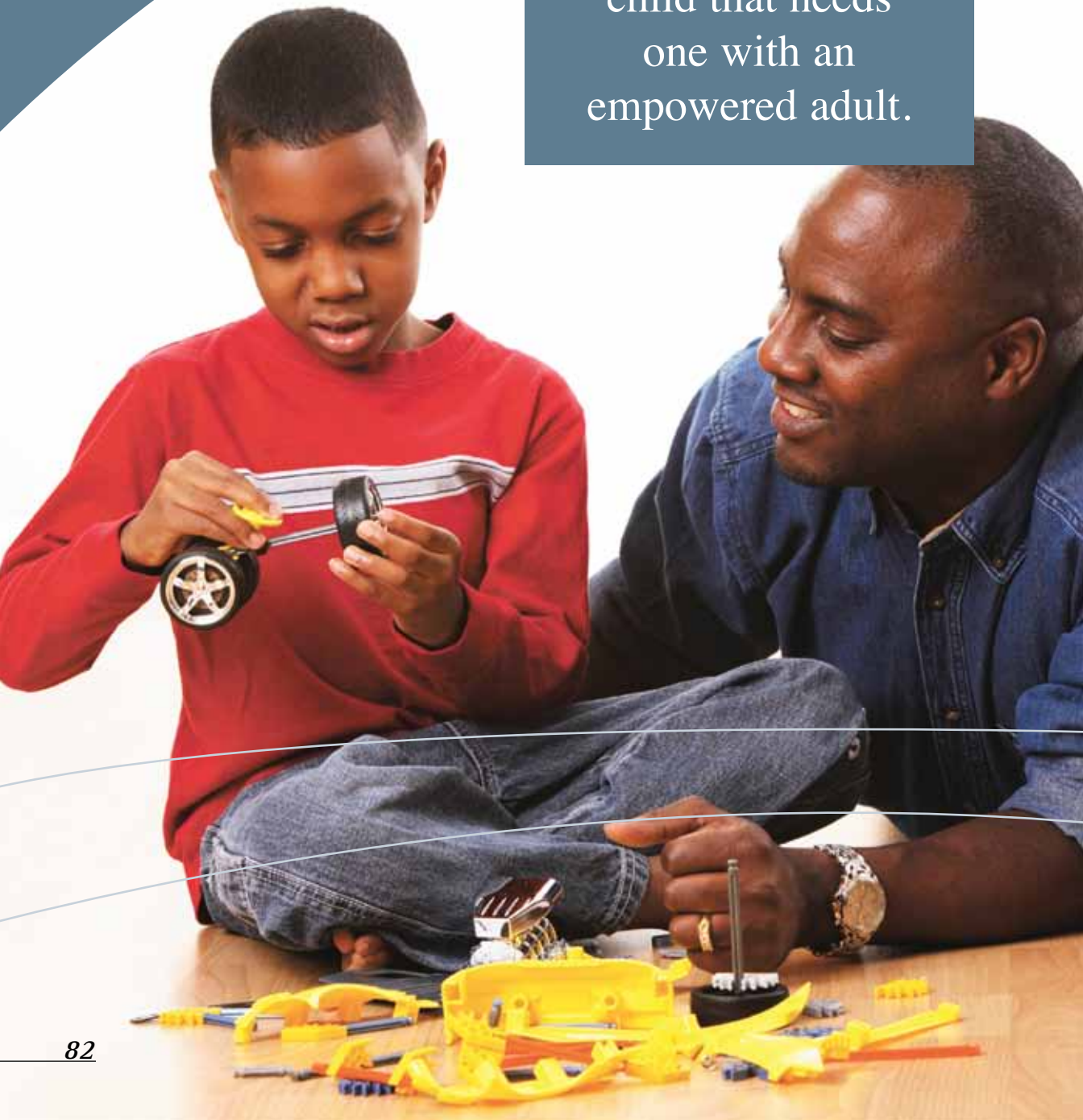


If you ever asked,  
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# What Our Children Need

## *A Meaningful Longitudinal Relationship With An Empowered Adult*

Like you, I've struggled to identify both the causes of, and the solutions to, the challenges that our community faces today.

I've found many complex causes. They range from racism to depression, poor education to a lack of employment opportunities, the on-going impact of negative mental legacies of slavery to a lack of personal empowerment, international economic trends to a lack of commitment by major American capitalists to the welfare of America's middle class, and drug abuse to inadequate parenting. The causes are many and complex. The symptoms of these causes are the behaviors that result in our concern.

I've found countless attempted solutions. There are programs designed to reduce the negative impact of the symptoms. For some children these programs are enough, for they only need a little intervention. Yet, they are wholly inadequate to fulfill the need of those children for whom we are most concerned...and who are becoming an increasingly larger percentage of our youth population.

I've found only one real solution for those children with a significant need... only one solution adequate to ensure success. That solution is for the child to receive the benefits of:

### A MEANINGFUL LONGITUDINAL RELATIONSHIP WITH AN EMPOWERED ADULT.

By meaningful, I mean a loving, nurturing relationship where the adult imparts character, virtue, values, life skills, and motivation to the child. By longitudinal relationship, I mean long-term or multi-year; not an hour speech or a half day once a month, but an ongoing relationship involving whatever amount of time is required to ensure success. Obviously, the amount of time needed is dependent upon the condition of the child, just as the time that any one individual can devote to being the empowered adult for a child varies. To be successful, there must be a match between the time the child needs and the time that the empowered adult can devote to that child. By empowered adult, I mean an adult who is in positive control of their own life. An adult who, while certainly imperfect, understands that character, virtue, values, life skills, and education empower individuals.

An adult who recognizes that no one ever reaches full empowerment, yet who constantly strives to become more personally empowered, and who is willing to make the time to invest in the empowerment of a child in need of...a meaningful longitudinal relationship with an empowered adult.



# Parents Have the Power

This is exactly the role of parents. It is a difficult task, even when two parents are involved, to successfully impart personal empowerment to their children. It is more difficult if one is a single parent. It's tough work. It's what children require. Yet, because we come into and leave this world with nothing but our experiences...our children are our immortality. Just as our time is our life. What better way to spend our life than assuring that our immortality receives what they need to flourish?

Those children who receive a meaningful longitudinal relationship with an empowered adult at home flourish in many and varied positive ways. Children who do not receive it become the children that society fears: the children who become the adults for whom the ability to live a happy and fulfilling life is simply not possible...unless they as adults receive ongoing mentoring and attention from an empowered adult.

You see, we all come into this world with a need to be consistently, competently, and reliably cared for. When this need is met, our worth is validated, and we open ourselves up to positive developmental experiences. We achieve success, and this allows us to have the courage to tackle and master more difficult developmental experiences. We grow and flourish as happy children.

When this need is not met, emotional and physical pain is the result. We are frustrated and close ourselves down to positive developmental experiences. Our worth is not validated. At some point, the pain and frustration must find an outlet, usually as destructive or self-destructive behaviors...as we struggle to validate our own worth, without the validation of our own worth by those who care for us.

Examine the life of any successful child and you will find a meaningful longitudinal relationship with an empowered adult. Examine the life of a child truly failing to develop positively, and you will find that they are missing this kind of relationship. I find, and am certain, that it is really that simple.

The level of intervention that a child needs from those other than their parents depends on the quality of the parenting experience that they are receiving from their parents. Given good delivery at home, they only need out-of-home developmental experiences to expand their sense of control and success—sports teams, music lessons, etc. Others need a family friend or relative to spend time with them at critical times while letting them know that s/he is there for them when needed. Historically, the Uncles and Aunts so common in the Black community served this need well.





## When Parents Aren't There, Someone Else Must Be

At the other extreme, the children from totally dysfunctional or child abusive households need a home: a foster home or an adoptive home. They need to be removed from these most destructive relationships and given parents with the ability and willingness to raise children effectively. The selling of family members during slavery ingrained a willingness and effectiveness for loving and raising the biological children of others, as our own, within our community. We have always done this, and do so today...we simply aren't doing it for each child which requires it today, as we did during slavery. We're simply not as intimately involved in each other's lives. We aren't directly confronted with the need to adopt and/or foster, although we do so vastly more often than that of other communities. Yet still not enough to fill the need. Yet aren't there enough of us to fill the need? We simply must recognize the need and step forward...

In between this continuum of needs are the children who need a longitudinal mentoring relationship, or a Big Brothers/Big Sisters-type relationship. These young adults are ready to take greater positive control over their lives, but need someone to impart skills (such as teaching them to read) while allowing them to validate their worth by recognizing that someone who they value is giving of their life (their time) to assist them.

If you ever asked, "What can I do?" the

answer is to provide a meaningful longitudinal relationship to a child that needs one with an empowered adult. Each of us who is empowered, or relatively empowered, can do this if we make it a priority...if we devote the time. By ensuring that we provide it to a child whose need matches the time we can devote, we can ensure success... by ensuring, as a community, as our top priority, that each child receives love, attention, and discipline, in the magnitude necessary to ensure their successful development, from a caring, empowered adult.

This commitment requires time, and our time is our life. Yet it provides the greatest satisfaction possible in life...to know that you have shaped your own immortality, our immortality. For a child must not be your own biological child to represent your immortality, and no child, no immortality is fully shaped by a only one or two individuals. All those who have meaningfully touched/shaped that child's life share that immortality. We, as no other group on the face of the earth, recognize that child rearing is a community responsibility...the principal and primary community responsibility. Now that we know the solution...let's be about it. Time Tithing is our past and our hope for the future. There is no more meaningful voluntary service opportunity for our Time Tithe than providing a meaningful longitudinal relationship with an empowered adult!