

YOU SHALL TEACH THEM
Deuteronomy 6

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Parenting is so difficult. The baby is much easier to take care of in the womb, well at least from a dad's perspective. Once the baby is out of the womb, they start all types of dangerous and destructive behavior. They start to put things in their mouth — not a problem in the womb. They start to cry and keep you up all night. They never cry while you're pregnant.

Parenting is not easy. You bring the baby home. "What if we don't know how much to feed it. It will starve. And discipline — well, if we are too lenient, he will be so rotten that everyone (everyone but us) will smell him coming. And if we are too strict, we will crush her spirit, make a shy and timid one that will fail Speech 101 in college because.... College, did you say college? How much is tuition going to be in 18 years?"

Making the decision to have a child — it's momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body. If bringing the baby home from the hospital is tough, what about facing adolescence thirteen years later. Victor Strasburger, M.D., chief of adolescent medicine at the University of New Mexico, recalled the parents who thought that the symptoms displayed by their teen was a sign of a brain tumor, when actually they were just seeing signs of normal adolescence.

This morning I want to focus on a few broad principles for parenting. There are many principles that could be shared, but I want to focus on four.

I. PARENT BY BEING

You've heard the old adage, "What you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying." Caught, not taught.

Kids are always looking.

When you thought I wasn't looking, you hung my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another.

When you thought I wasn't looking you fed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking you baked a birthday cake just for me, and I knew that little things were special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking you said a prayer, and I believed there was a God that I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking you kissed me goodnight, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt – but that it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking – I looked...and wanted to say thanks for all those things you did when you thought I wasn't looking.

(Mary Rita Shilke Korzan, "When You Thought I Wasn't Looking," *Stories for the Family's Heart*, ed. Alice Gray)

We must lead by example. Most teenagers do not look to either Mother Teresa or Patrick Mahomes as role models. In fact, a recent Gallup Poll indicates that more than half of all teens don't have anyone that they admire and want to be like. No guidepost by which to do life. "Having such folks to look up to is essential to negotiating the roadblocks of adolescence." Psychiatrist Henry Gault asserts that "It is important for teens to have someone to imitate, idolize, someone who gives them strength and motivation."

•James Brewster, 17, Albuquerque, "Stars and sports figures are not role models to me. You should look up to your parents – they are the ones who will always want the best for you."

•Emalie Huriaus, 15, San Ramon, California: "My mother lived in a teeny, tiny town in Pennsylvania, and lived so poor. But she made the best of it and moved on, graduated from college, got a better life. I just think that is neat."

•Matthew Otteman, 16, Omaha: "My dad is most influential in my life. I have many of his mannerisms, speech patters, vocabulary. I have his same outlook."

•Gena Ward, 16, Atlanta: "My mother has managed to raise two children all by herself and provide for us in an incredible way. And when I think of her income! I really, really respect her." (*USA Today*, 9/13/93)

Parent by being.

The story is told of a TV repairman who didn't like to think about his job when he came home. As a result, he never bothered to properly install the TV antenna on the top of his house or fix it when one arm broke in a windstorm. One day a new family moved in next door, and the owner went up on his roof to install an antenna. Knowing that his neighbor was a TV repairman, he put his up exactly the same way and turned his antenna to face the same direction as his neighbor's. Then, after studying his neighbor's antenna or a while, he reached up and broke one arm off his new antenna!

As parents, we teach by example, whether we intend to or not!

Our kids look at us and decide what we really stand for. In their own way, they want to know if we are “for real.”

We can talk as much as we desire, but somehow they know – they know if we are “for real.”

We bring them home from the hospital and they start immediately – watching. Watching what we do. They watch long before they can listen with understanding. They just watch us to learn how to do life. And they will not let you off the hook, no matter who you are. They will not play the games that we play. They are genuine. Even if you are a pastor, and a lot of people think that you are “for real,” your children will make their own judgment. They will not simply buy the party line.

We can't teach our children to forgive when they see us hold grudges against members of our family.

We can't teach our children that a relationship to Christ is important when our children see us sleep in on Sunday morning, not making it a priority to gather together in worship with the people of God.

They look at us to see what we do. They realize what we all realize – you can't tell what a person stands for by what they say. The only real measuring rod is what they do.

It's dangerous that we have to parent by being. There is no way to cheat, no way to avoid the dilemma. They look at you. They look at me. They see right through us to who we really are.

James Dobson wrote the following.

Have you ever found the courage to say “I'm sorry” to a child? It is difficult to do, and my father was never very good at it. I remember working with him in the backyard when I was fifteen years of age, on a day when he was particularly irritable for some reason. He crabbed at me for everything I did, even though I tried to please him. Finally, he yelled at me for something petty, and I had had enough. I threw down the rake and quit. Defiantly, I walked across our property and down the street as my dad demanded that I come back. It was one of the few occasions I ever took him on like that!

I meandered around town for a while, wondering what would happen to me when I finally went home. I ended up at my cousin's house on the other side of town. After several hours there, I admitted what I had done, and my uncle urged me to phone. With knees quaking, I called my dad.

“Stay there,” he said. “I'm coming over.”

To say that I was scared would be an understatement. Dad arrived in a short time and asked to see me alone.

“Bo,” he began, “I didn’t treat you right this afternoon. I was riding your back for no good reason, and I’m sorry. Your mom and I want you to come home now.”

It was a tough moment for him, but he made a friend for life. And in so doing, he taught me something about apologizing that would someday be useful to me as a father.” (“The Apology,” James Dobson, *Coming Home*, p. 70)

II. SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Look at Deuteronomy 6

Verse 2. Faith is for families.

Verse 4ff. Here we have the very heart of the confession of God’s people. God is one. He is to be the sole object of Israel’s faith.

Verses 7-9. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy there is a special emphasis on the task of sharing your faith with your children. The writer is saying that the demands of Yahweh’s covenant are to be the subject of continued conversation at all times in the home – by day and by night – an absorbing interest of a man’s whole life.

Deuteronomy 6:20-21 and 11:19. Even as Israel was to share the stories of faith with her children, so are we.

We must make our values their values, our God as their God.

Dr. James Dobson remembers a time when his own career was eating more and more into any small amount of time he had for his family.

Although my activities were bringing me professional advancement and the trappings of financial success, my dad was not impressed. He had watched my hectic life-style and felt obligated to express his concern. He did so in a lengthy letter which included the following paragraph:

“I have observed that the greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout Christians simply because their parents have been or that any of them will enter into the Christian faith in any other way than through their parents’ deep travail of prayer and faith. But this prayer demands time – time that cannot be given if it is all signed and conscripted and laid on the altar of career ambition. Failure for you at this point would make mere success in your occupation a very pale and washed-out affair indeed.”

The greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout people of God simply because we are. What a powerful statement. Yes, it’s important to be an example, that is certain. But more than that, we must share our faith with our children. Pray for their day of salvation.

My parents gave me the greatest gift that any parents can give a child. It was not having all the toys I wanted or never being punished for doing wrong. It was being raised attending church and learning the truth about God's love and salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. The greatest gift a parent can give is the knowledge of how important a right relationship with God is. This gift, above all others, has affected every area of my life and will continue to for the rest of my days.

When I was a child, I was adopted by a family that had two sons but wanted a daughter. When I was five, my parents started attending an Assembly of God church. We attended almost every service – if the doors were open, you could find us there! At that church, I learned the special stories of the Bible. As a great lover of animals – all kinds of animals – I liked Noah's story best. I had a plastic ark with a complete menagerie of plastic animals, and I would walk them up into the boat two by two. I always wondered how Noah got all those animals on to the ark. (Julie Makimaa)

We must share our faith with our children.

A young minister told the story. His family was eating dinner one evening when he was just a small boy. His father, pastor of the nearby Baptist church, was gulping down his food, obviously in a hurry to leave. The boy looked at his dad and asked, "Daddy, are you going somewhere tonight?"

"Yes, son," he replied, "I am going visiting."

"What is visiting?" the little fellow asked.

"Well," the father began, "visiting is when people from the church go out together into the community to meet people. They pray with them, talk for a while, tell them about Jesus, and just get to know them as friends."

The little boy grew silent for a minute and then thought out loud, "Boy, I wish someone would come and visit us." The father, who had been spending a great deal of time away from home lately due to the demands of the church, realized what his son meant.

The dad did leave. Fifteen minutes later the doorbell rang. The little boy answered the door and discovered the father standing on the porch.

"Hello," his dad said, "I'm the pastor of the church next door, and I have come to visit with you and your family tonight."

So they told Bible stories and prayed. They played games and ate snacks. They spent time getting to know each other.

Share your faith with your family.

III. DON'T RAIN ON YOUR CHILD'S PARADE

Frank Peretti, author of the best selling Christian novel *This Present Darkness*, remembers a dad who did not rain on his parade.

You know, it never entered my mind that I might not succeed in building a full-size blimp in the backyard, and Dad never flinched at the idea.

“Just be sure to get the grass cut, and don’t leave nails and boards lying around,” he said, and he went back to painting the porch.

I had plenty of nails and boards. The previous summer’s twenty-foot model of the Titanic hadn’t quite gotten past the keel-lying stage, so behind the garage there was a sizable pile of two-by-twos bristling with nails. My brothers and I pulled out all the nails, pounded them straight on the patio, and put them to work holding the two-by-twos together again, only in a different shape.

What a feeling, driving in that first nail! It was the same feeling I had when we started building a mad scientist’s lab in the basement – complete with a monster on a slab – so we could make a blockbuster movie with Dad’s old Standard 7 spring-wound movie camera.

Or when we started making hot air balloons out of laundry bags and raining them down on the neighborhood...

Or when we bought two old lawn mowers at the Goodwill so we could use the engines to power the two airplanes we were building in the garage out of the two-by-twos that would soon become the keel for the Titanic...

Or when I built that robot...

Or when we made an eight-foot giant to wear on our shoulders so we could stalk the neighborhood and scare everybody (we made it out of the two-by-twos because it was more fun than the blimp)...

Or when we dug up the alley because we were going to build a World’s Fair...

Dad never flinched. He never said, “It’s a dumb idea” or “It’ll never work” or “Remember the last project?”

No, he just let us use his tools and the same old nails and, as long as we put the tools back and didn’t kill ourselves, he just watched.

Don’t ever rain on your child’s parade.

Even when you know they are wrong or silly, don’t rob them of their ability to dream grand dreams.

Tony Campolo, dynamic Christian communicator, remembers his mother.

My mother also had a way of minimizing my failures and accentuating my accomplishments. Over and over again she told me how proud she was of anything I did that had any value. I don't ever remember her saying, "You could have done better." Instead, she always made me feel that I had done more than had been expected of me. I would hear her tell her friends, "That boy of mine is really something. He doesn't have the advantages of most kids in this neighborhood, but look how well he's doing in school. Who would have guessed that my boy would be so successful?" (*What My Parents Did Right*)

IV. GIVE YOUR CHILD YOUR BLESSING

Oh, how we long for the blessing from our parents. For them to tell us they are pleased with us.

Too often our children get the idea that our love, our blessing, or acceptance of them is based upon their performing up to our expectations. Children need to know that our love for them is a "no matter what" kind of love.

Sure we need discipline. And it's necessary to correct a child's actions and attitudes, but we must never tie that correction to their personhood, to their sense of value and self-esteem.

In fact, we unwittingly turn our children off to God when we do so. When a child feels that she cannot live up to her mother's expectations, how in the world then could she live up to God's standards?

How many children grow up with negative messages about who they are. "You're stupid." "You'll never amount to anything."

Self-confidence destroyed.

Some of you here today, even adults, are still trying to prove to your parents that you are somebody. Still trying in the never-ending search to gain your father's or mother's acceptance. You're trying to prove what not even a child should have to prove – that you're accepted by your parents.

Give your child your blessing.

You planned for her to be a brain surgeon and she really enjoys cutting hair. She feels the disappointment. You can't hide it. And she forever lives in the shadow of your displeasure.

There must be such a thing as a child with average ability, but you can't find a parent who will admit that it is his child. (Thomas Bailey, State Superintendent of Schools)

We all want superhuman kids to grow up to be superhuman adults. And we are pushing too hard, and expecting too much, and our kids are uncertain of our love when they fail.

Christian singer Larnelle Harris remembers an unconditional, relaxed love.

It was a warm spring morning, and we were returning from the daily chore of slopping the pigs and feeding the other animals. It was the most unexpected question I'd ever heard from him. Walking up Randolph Hill, the only road that led back to our house, my dad asked, "Lonnie, want to race?"

Well, I considered myself pretty fast in those days. I also had a reputation for never turning down a challenge. But race my dad? "What if I beat him?" I thought to myself. "Boy, if I beat him, I might be slopping those pigs alone for the next ten years! Or, worse yet, what if he beats me? What would I say to my friends? Or what if this old guy suddenly keeled over after inhaling the cloud of dust – my trademark – at takeoff? After all, he must be twenty-five years old! He could have a heart attack! Mom would never forgive me. In a few short minutes, I could be fatherless and Mom could be without a husband."

I regained my composure and looked up at him with a kind of smugness in my smile and thought, "Lonnie, this man has challenged you – and that's that!"

Then, before I knew what was happening, he interrupted my thoughts with his words. He shouted them quickly, almost as though he were trying to get an edge by catching me off guard. "Ready. Set. Go!" And we were off.

In the distance, I could see Mom as she stepped out of the back door of our house, her hands waving in the morning sun as though she were cheering for her favorite team. Oh, it was nip and tuck, neck and neck for the first few yards. But soon it was all over.

The next thing I remember is the three of us lying in the yard, gasping for air and laughing so hard that tears ran down our faces. Dad's laughter was probably due to the fact that it had been some time since he had run thirty yards like that! Mom gathered the both of us up in her arms, laughing and enjoying the fun of being together. My laughter came from the discovery that my dad could run – he really could run.

When I had kids of my own, I realized another reason why this memory is special. It was a moment very typical of my parents. Dad and Mom, though busy always making ends meet and dealing with all that grown-ups have to be concerned with, often took time to be involved in my little world.

Oh, who won the race? It didn't matter.