

# Outbursts of Wisdom

Thoughts from a Dad  
with Extraordinary Kids



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## **A Compelling Passion**

Purpose is what you're called to do. Passion, what you're compelled to do.

What absolutely compels you? What grips your soul and won't let go?

When God is both the author and the audience of what compels you, that's God-honoring passion. God-honoring passion isn't any ol' passion. Any ol' passion gratifies, but God-honoring passion also glorifies. Any ol' passion loves the people you love most; God-honoring passion loves the people you love least. The former achieves goals; the latter accelerates giftedness.

God-honoring passion has unending determination to realize God-given dreams. More than living before you die; it's dying to yourself so that you can truly live. It converts how you see, as evidenced by how you act. It multiplies your talents before laying them at Jesus' feet, rather than burying them (Matthew 25) or giving Him the lame and leftovers (Malachi 1).

It's the burning desire that doesn't burn up or burn out, and why you pass up the good to pass along the great. It's why you love the unlovely, believe the unbelievable, and forgive 70 x 7 times without keeping score. It's your unconditional tenacity, no-matter-what, and never-say-die. It's your "oh no, I will not" when tempted to fall and your "oh yes, I will" when challenged to rise.

What is your most compelling passion? Is it God-honoring?

My compelling passion is to experience Matthew 25:21 – feeling Jesus' warm embrace and hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Through good times and bad, it's my compass that always points north. My rock. My shield.

That's why, 10 years ago, I started writing *Well Done Mom & Dad! A Practical Guide to Turn Good Intentions into Godly Legacies*. But the book totally changed when God changed my dream ... when my

grand dream became a grand family dream . . . that is, to watch Jesus say, “Well done!” TO MY KIDS!! My family dream is so vivid to me that it’s surreal, yet completely real.

I can see the tears streaming down my kids’ cheeks as they hug Jesus. I can feel their utter joy. I can sense their overwhelming peace. After embracing Jesus, they rise and run to me, throw their arms around me, and we embrace. Forever. Together. Every struggle, every life stage, every challenge we navigated . . . each one is now worth it all. We’re safely home.

Hearing my Lord’s “Well done!” isn’t just a message; it’s a mission. Therefore, I started writing blogs at [timalba.com](http://timalba.com). And like this collection of blogs, *Well Done Mom & Dad!* isn’t a book of cookie-cutter parenting tips and techniques. It’s a guide for parents to discover how to lead themselves, and, in turn, lead their kids to live, with God-honoring passion.

When you do, you’re preparing your kids to do what I describe in *Well Done Mom & Dad!* – turn passion into success, success into significance, and significance into faithfulness . . . the faithfulness that results in hearing, “Well done!” from both God and your family.

Then again, when someone like my grandson, Acre Bright, endorses my book, you know he’s right. Who could possibly argue with this little guy in the attached photo? Don’t even try.

Here’s how you can learn more about how to live and lead with God-honoring passion:

- 1) watch a 3 ½-minute video: <https://youtu.be/pnohYreQo9Y> and
- 2) order your own book copy(s): [https://www.amazon.com/s?k=tim+alba&ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=tim+alba&ref=nb_sb_noss_1)

I promise it will change your family . . . if you let it change YOU.

# FOUNDATIONS





## **1 Question That Can Transform Your Kids' Future**

Too often, we parents look back and wish for do-overs. “If only I had . . .” Amidst the heat of potty training, training wheels, training bras, and drivers training, we get busy, overwhelmed, or uncertain.

We want better, but great intentions don't birth great kids as long as we live with three heart realities: 1) no need, 2) no urgency, or 3) no hope. We know better, we'll improve later, or we think it's too late. Each one may be true in a particular moment, but they're a stealthy breeding ground for do-overs if they're patterns birthed in our hearts.

Other parents are proactive, but pursue quick, simple solutions to “fix” kids. If we can just get through today, right? But tomorrow ends up much like today because of a fourth reason – the stealthiest reason – for missing God's blessing as Christian parents: no vision.

Visionary parents love kids for who they are, but they see kids for who they can become. You too can be a visionary parent because you can prepare your kids for eternity by living out your answer to this one question . . . a question that can transform your kids' future:

### **Will I be the parent I prefer to be OR the parent my kids need me to be?**

Our vision determines our verdict. By default, we raise kids the way we prefer – how we were raised. As a young dad, I couldn't imagine another way because that's how my dad did it. Sure, I changed some things because we all wished for better when we were kids, but I still parented how I was comfortable . . . how I preferred.

My family's future transformed not because of a quest to become a great parent, but because of a question that exposed the kind of parent I really was. Being the parent kids need starts with asking

them and then truly listening. Strap on, though, because they'll likely tell you what they think. For example, I was shocked when my son said he needed me to be vulnerable.

Whaaat? Vulnerability isn't my comfort zone. Not my preference. But parent leadership isn't what you or I want. It's not even what our kids want. It's what our kids *need* to be faithful. In order to connect with my faith, my son needed to first connect with me. Then again, you can't fix what you don't know, so you need to become an inquisitive student of what your kids and what they need, which is different for every child.

Our vision also determines our victory. Victory for me is seeing my kids and grandkids feel the warm embrace of a loving, righteous God as they enter heaven. Your vision will differ from mine, but do you have a clear vision of what victory looks like for your family? If your vision becomes reality, will it result in the Lord's warm embrace? No matter the specifics of your family vision, please remember that each child needs it applied to them in unique ways that they need. It's not what *I want*. And it's not what *they want*. It's what *they need* to be faithful.

If we will, we can look back with joy, not do-overs, because over and over we're doing the parenting version of II Timothy 2:2: "And the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

**Questions:** How are your preferences impeding your kids' future? How well do you know what your kids need to be faithful, and will you commit to be that for them?



## 2 Kinds of Parents . . . Which One Are You?

Welcome to the wild, wacky, wonderful world of parenting. We can't wait to be parents. Once we have kids, though, we finally appreciate why our parents' struggled. I too have asked, "How can I break my son's bad habits and fix his behavior?" "How in the world do I stop my daughter's drama?"

Parenting isn't for the faint of heart, but it's a blessing for the faithful heart. For indeed, my sons' "interesting" little boy habits matured into remarkable men and my little drama queen became an inspiring woman. Wild and wacky at times? Absolutely. But parenting is also a wonderful privilege because our kids are a gift from God and, in turn, our gift back to God in a world that needs His love.

In my prior blog, I asked a question that can transform your kids' future: Will I be the parent I prefer to be OR the parent my kids need me to be? Today's blog asks a second question to help you answer the first one:

### Am I more like Parent A or Parent B?

#### Parent A

Breaks habits  
Fixes behavior  
Stops drama

#### Parent B

Bonds hearts  
Funnels beliefs  
Shapes dreams

Parent A is a good parent. These well-intended parents work hard to break little Suzie's bad habits, fix her behavior, and stop her drama. All good things. All needed for Suzie's success. But there's a problem. That's **Default Parenting** – the good intentions that get you through another day. And well-intended is not well done. Today's drama will become tomorrow's trauma unless we help our kids want saving faith for themselves.

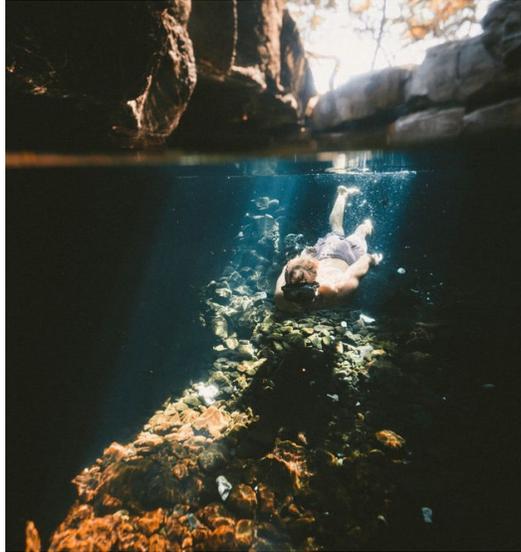
Parent B, though, sees little Suzie differently – as tomorrow's champion, not today's challenge. These parents also break Suzie's habits, but do so by bonding with her heart. They fix her behavior by funneling her beliefs. And they stop her drama by shaping her dreams. That's **Well-done Parenting** – turning well-intended choices into children who hear, "Well done!" They don't make Suzie's choices; they make it easy for her to choose well and one day hear God say, "Well done!" (Matthew 25:21).

Parent A (default parent) puts kids on the path to success; Parent B (well-done parent) also puts kids on the path to faithfulness. Parent A focuses on today; Parent B, eternity. Kids need both, but they

especially need us to mirror how God bonds, funnels, and shapes us into His image. They need us to create an environment that hungers and thirsts for faithfulness. They need a Parent B who shows love and respect, models servant leadership, and highlights the character already within them.

In the next four blogs, we'll unpack why your kids need you to bond with their hearts, funnel their beliefs, and shape their dreams . . . and how to do so. Whether your kids are toddlers, teenagers, or adults, they need you to be Parent B – a well-done parent – who helps them pursue God's preferences, not their own default preferences. And no matter you age or stage, it's never too early or too late to start.

**Questions:** Are you more like Parent A or Parent B, and why? What is one thing you can do today to open your kids' hearts to becoming tomorrow's champion?



## **A Whole New World of Parenting**

It's easy to be cocky about parenting until you become one. Turns out, it's a little scary to dive in. If only parenting came with a floatation device to keep your head above water. That's what I saw with my dad at Molikini . . .

A tepid swimmer at best, my dad quickly joined my son Josh and me on an ocean snorkel trip to Molikini's partially-submerged volcanic crater. Josh and I did a cowabungu dive and were overwhelmed by breathtaking 150-foot crystal-clear visibility of hundreds of fish species. We realized, though, that something was wrong. My dad never left the boat. Turns out, diving in was scarier than he first thought.

After much convincing, Dad gave his floatation device the death grip, slid in, and slowly eased his snorkel mask into the water. Instantly, he popped out of the water with bugged out eyes and proclaimed, "Tim, there's a WHOLE new world down there!"

### **A whole new world**

So too, there really is a whole new world of parenting down there if you'll grab the help you need, take the plunge, and get below the surface. I want to help you enjoy the breathtaking joys of parenting, not just paddle around trying to keep your head above water.

My prior blog – "2 Kinds of Parents . . . Which One Are You?" – asked if you're more like Parent A (default parent) or Parent B (well-done parent). Parent A breaks their kids' bad habits, fixes behavior, and stops drama. All good things. But Parent B sees kids as champions, not challenges. Parent B breaks kids' bad habits by bonding with their hearts, fix behavior by funneling beliefs, and stop drama by shaping dreams. This is the first of four blogs to encourage you to enjoy a whole new world by becoming Parent B.

We're not trying to be perfect parents; we're putting kids on the path to faithfulness. We're preparing them to receive the faith we're trying to pass down and walking with them arm in arm. Rather than

pushing kids to be like you, we're leading them to be like Jesus. Here's an overview of three parts that make this path possible.

### **3 parts of putting kids on the path to faithfulness**

#### **1. Bond with their hearts**

Putting kids on this path starts by bonding with their hearts. The next blog shows research on the #1 reason faith legacies get passed down to future generations: when kids bond with parents, especially their father. Beliefs and dreams are important, but kids need Mom and Dad to first bond with their hearts through receptivity, intrigue, and connection. Bonding creates *openness*.

#### **2. Funnel their beliefs**

Next, we'll see how to funnel kids' beliefs. It's been said that everyone has a hole in their heart that only God can fill. And parents can't let the world fill that void in their kids. You can't install beliefs upon them, but you can instill beliefs within them. You can't cram our beliefs into our kids' hearts, but you can help them choose wisely what they allow into their life funnel. Kids learn how to hold that funnel by watching us pour godly beliefs into ours. Funneling aligns families by celebrating uniqueness and creating *oneness*.

#### **3. Shape their dreams**

The final part of putting kids on the path to faithfulness is shaping their dreams. Bonding unlocks. Funneling aligns. Shaping propels. We'll see how to help kids pursue a profound future by becoming a student of their giftedness and passions, nudging their rudder, and encouraging their character. Rather than living vicariously through our kids, let's help them live victoriously with God-sized dreams. Shaping creates *opportunities*.

In the next three blogs, I'll unpack how to create openness, oneness, and opportunities. Turns out, it's not as scary as it appears. Anna and I don't have all the answers, but we'll share how others have invested in us and how our family's failures and successes can encourage and challenge you to experience a whole new world of parenting . . . if only you'll take the plunge.

**Questions:** How has God bonded with your heart, funneled your beliefs, and shaped your dreams? How could you do the same with your kids or grandkids?



## **Bonding with Your Kids' Hearts**

“But, Mom, you don’t understand!” “Dad, why don’t you let me do anything?!” Chances are, you said something like this as a kid, as have your kids. I’ll never forget arguing with my thirteen-year-old daughter after she smooched a boy and said, “Oh, Dad, you don’t know boys!” How could I? I’m just a grown boy. Ah, the wisdom of teenagers.

Even if your kids can’t yet grasp the faith legacy you’re trying to pass down, there’s one thing – the best thing – you can do to prepare them to embrace your legacy one day. It’s not breaking their bad habits . . . it’s bonding with their hearts.

### **Why bonding matters**

In *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations*, Vern Bengtson researches why some families pass down their faith, while others don’t. His conclusion after tracking 350 families for four decades: faith legacies continue most when kids bond with their parents, especially their fathers. Despite vast societal changes, these “bonded” kids are more likely to continue their families’ faith than leave it.

Preparing kids to embrace faith legacies is much like recruiting team members at work. Too many applicants try to convince me, instead of first leading me to be receptive, creating intrigue for me to want to know more, and connecting with me once I’m interested. So too, many parents try to convince kids, instead of creating an environment of openness.

Convincing, cajoling, or convicting doesn’t create openness. Openness in kids happens when parents are conduits of God’s transformation. Sometimes, that requires apologizing. Other times, it’s forgiving or recommitting. But it always starts by leading yourself well in order to lead your kids well. Still, please

don't wait until you're ready. Start right where you are with three keys to bonding with your kids' hearts: Receptivity, Intrigue, and Connection.

### **3 keys to bond with your kids**

#### **1. Receptivity**

First, create receptivity. We easily involve kids in what we enjoy, but we need to learn to love what they love. For example, it was easy to share root beer floats and rides in my two-seater convertible because I already loved that, but I learned to love jazz when my son became a jazz musician. Same with my kids' choir concerts, band competitions, and other "acquired" interests. All became tools for receptivity because my family needed to bond with me in order to bond with my Lord.

#### **2. Intrigue**

Next, create intrigue. Like a great musician or speaker, make lasting impressions that cause kids to want more. Don't overload. Don't answer questions they aren't asking. Don't be mysterious. Instead, steadily unpack the mysteries of life and Scripture in ways they increasingly grasp. We're not controlling them with a corrective fix; we're cultivating a thirst for a compelling future.

#### **3. Connection**

After creating receptivity and intrigue, godly legacies need connection – the gateway to relationships. Kids forget our speeches on conduct, but they remember our spirit of connection. Much to my surprise, my kids didn't just want to know about my life; they wanted to know me. Successes and failures. Strengths and weaknesses. Qualities and warts. Kids want to know you're real in order to know if your faith is real.

Bonding begins with why. We're not trying to win popularity contests, post successes on Facebook, or avoid the shame of broken kids. We're bonding with our kids so that they want to bond with our God. We do our part to create openness so that they're open to letting God do His part. Then, even when our all-wise teenagers think we can't possibly understand their problems, they can believe we understand something far more important – their heart.

**Questions:** How well do you know your kids' hearts, and how well do they know yours? What is one thing you can do to help them be open to the faith you want them to carry on?



## **Funneling Your Kids' Beliefs**

When exactly do you stop parenting? Is it when kids stop listening? When they graduate? When they have their own kids and realize you're smarter than they thought? As a dad of three adult kids, I now know the answer: Never.

Parents can't badger or beg kids into choosing the beliefs that funnel into their lives. We have to lead them. By helping them choose what they pour into their lives, we help kids cherish what pours out.

For example, we'd like to pick our kids' friends, but that's a recipe for rebellion. Instead, we need to guide them in deciding what they want from relationships, which, in turn, helps them choose great friends. Why? Because we can't cram something down their throats and wonder why they choke on it. Our job is to prepare kids to *want* real faith when they're adults. That's what my daughter did seven months after our family vacation . . .

### **A "Bold" preparation**

Before a family vacation, I gave our adult kids and their spouses an exercise. Using a list of 400+ character qualities (sorted A to Z), each couple picked one word from each letter that they wanted to define their family's character. For example, my daughter's A word was Authentic, B was Bold, and eventually Zealous for Z. We laughed and affirmed each couple's list of 26 character qualities, but what still gives me chills happened seven months later.

When my daughter shared her 26 A-to-Z character words that night, she announced she was pregnant with our first grandchild. And seven months later when Cade Bolder Medlin was born, it hit me. Her "B" word was "Bold." She chose in advance that she wanted her family to be bold for Christ . . . so she named her firstborn Bolder. Wowww! While I can't promise grandkids from funneling your kids' beliefs, I can promise that it will change your family. Our little Cade Bolder is living proof.

The goal of funneling beliefs is oneness. Not sameness. Not forcing, copying, or begging. Oneness allows plenty of room for individual expression, but aligns families around a want-to for godly beliefs. Unique, yet united. Relevant, yet related. Many components, yet one core.

Oneness starts with openness, as we saw in the blog: “Bonding with Our Kids’ Hearts.” Once kids are open, though, don’t let the world fill their life funnels. Fill kids with beliefs that put them on the path to faithfulness. Why? Because what flows in will eventually flow out. Here are three steps to help your kids choose what they let flow in, so that they cherish what flows out.

### **3 steps to funnel your kids’ beliefs**

#### **1. Help kids position their life funnel**

The first step may seem simple, but it’s profoundly important – help kids want to position their own life funnel. Young kids want to please, so they often let us choose for them. But that doesn’t last long. Our influence stops sinking in because they stop receiving it. Sometimes it’s due to rebellion, but often it’s because of a stealthier problem – they simply go with the flow.

Even bad choices are better than going with the flow because bad choices can be redirected. But it’s nearly impossible to fix the default consequences of not choosing. (My upcoming book, *Well Done, Mom & Dad!*, shows you how.) Once kids are willing to choose, they’re ready to receive beliefs that nourish their soul – the second step.

#### **2. Help kids let you pour in your godly beliefs**

Your kids need your influence, but do they want it? They’re open to the beliefs of whoever they connect with, whether it’s you or their friends. Therefore, pursue their connection, not their compliance. Their receptivity, not their approval.

Rather than fighting your kids over who’s right, fight their spiritual enemy who’s wrong. Don’t demand, draw. Lovingly lead and graciously guide so that they let you prime their pump with your beliefs. And, in turn, they’ll receive what God wants to pour into them – the third step.

#### **3. Help kids pour in their own godly beliefs**

Godly beliefs are birthed by your modeling and communicating, but they grow when kids have a thirst for godliness with their own unique flair. For example, Bolder wasn’t on my list of 400 character qualities to choose from, but Bolder is my daughter’s unique expression of godly beliefs.

Thankfully, my daughter isn’t copy my beliefs. She’s doing something far better – she’s boldly preparing her son to enjoy the greatest of all experiences – oneness in heaven (Philemon 8, Eph 3:11-12, II Cor 3:11-12, Heb 10:19).

**Questions:** Are you trying to force godly beliefs on your kids, or are you helping them godliness? How well are you preparing your kids to experience oneness in heaven?



## Shaping Your Kids' Dreams

As a boy, I wasn't just playing Batman. I *was* Batman. With ultra-cool cape, mask, and belt, Batman prowled the yard in search of villains and his two older sisters. Soon, though, reality began sinking in . . . because I had no bat mobile.

As a parent, the trick is shaping your kids' dreams without forcing yours or crushing theirs. To help them never stop dreaming. Growing up without giving up. Ever increasing, yet imagining far more.

Our dreams (and how we pursue them) tell our kids more about us than any lecture or lesson. They expand possibilities and maximize potential. Too often, we try to give our kids the world, yet omit what they need to enjoy that world – their own God-honoring dreams.

Pushing your dreams on kids causes opposition. But you can help mold their dreams, which fulfills them, honors God, and creates opportunity. Rather than allowing circumstances or friends to overlay your kids' dreams, stir their souls and create lid-lifting environments. Here are three keys to earning their trust so that they want your help in doing so.

### 3 keys to shaping your kids' dreams

#### 1. Become a student

Kids are watching. They're sizing you up. Your student is looking to see if you'll be a "student" of them – someone who really cares about what they think, and knows where they're coming from. Their friends do. Do you? If you want the opportunity to help shape your kids' dreams, become a student of their dreams. Know their passions, their giftedness, and their hurts.

In *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp writes: "Most parents cannot quickly generate a list of strengths and weaknesses of their children. (They) have not sat down and discussed their short-term and long-term goals for their children. They have not developed strategies for parenting." I too was that kind of parent, until realizing that leading at home starts with learning at home.

## **2. Nudge their rudder**

If you want the opportunity to help chart your kids' course, don't steer their ship. Nudge their rudder. The impact is similar, but working under the surface makes all the difference. Many parents love well, yet blow it when their kids get off course and they leap in to take over. Putting kids on the path to faithfulness requires simmering, not microwaving, your influence.

Kids also need rudder nudging to keep their dreams on course. Kids crash on autopilot. Granted, you can't give them a destination with GPS turn-by-turn directions, but you can provide a compass that keeps them pointing north. No matter your method, know your role. You can be your kids' navigator, second mate, or cook, but you can't be their captain.

## **3. Encourage their character**

If you want the opportunity to help your kids pursue godly dreams, encourage their character. Sift through their dirt to find the nuggets of hope already there. Keep searching. Keep exhorting. Keep positive. Correction is easy, but sharing praiseworthy character amidst the drama of youth takes a lot of work and a lot of encouragement.

### **A personal example**

If I could have one do-over as a young parent, it would be to encourage more and correct less. But since it's never too late to start, my kids became guinea pigs for all sorts of family exercises explained in my book *Well Done, Mom & Dad!* Here's one example.

In order to help shape our kids' dreams, our family created a "Declaration of Him-dependence" with twelve declarations to which we would aspire. And to make it more fun, we also took photos of a 1776-type signing ceremony. With a white colonial wig, black robe, feather pen, and Christian flag, we all signed our family's declaration. These goofy photos still hang by our stairs as reminders of how we together shaped a family dream with everyone's unique inputs.

Therefore, even if you don't wear an ultra-cool cape, mask, and belt, you can still be a superhero to your kids by becoming a student of them, nudging their rudder, and encouraging their character. Then again, God is our super hero because that's what He does for us.

**Questions:** On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you know your kids' dreams? How could you better nudge your kids' rudders (without steering their ships)? What's one nugget of your kids' character that you could praise today?

# **MARRIAGE**





## **A Wife's Embrace**

A young child's joy when Daddy comes home from work . . . there's nothing like it. Decades later, it still seems like yesterday. I'd rattle the door and here they'd come, all three kids screaming to welcome me home. Every 6 p.m. was a celebration.

Josh loved squeeze hugs and shaky hugs. Leslie wanted me to twirl her around and bellow, "Daddy looooooves Leslie." Caleb would hang on my leg as I walked around the kitchen. Even our dog, Abbey, got in the act, leaping and yelping until she too got my full embrace.

Funny how things change. Although Abbey never quite got over the thrill of my door rattle, the kids soon came to their senses. Their age and my cool index were an inverse relationship. The older they got, the less cool I somehow became.

But there was always one thing I could count on – my wife's embrace.

Granted, I've been attracted to my wife since college. (Her little cheerleader outfit didn't hurt . . . just sayin'.) But at some point, men learn that a hot wife doesn't necessarily mean a great life. Thankfully, I have both. After all these years, Anna still loves for me to come home and receive her love.

Our daily five second reunion feels like five minutes. Work worries melt away. Relational and financial pressures are forgotten. In that moment, nothing else matters. We're together again. Her embrace calms me when I need a chill pill, and it charges me up when I need a boost. As she stands on her tip toes, reaches her arms over my shoulders, and presses in, time stands still.

I can't earn or deserve her love because she's already chosen to give it. Her love flows from, and reflects, her love for God. She hugs me that way because she's hugs God that way. God's love flows through her. With that kind of love, I feel successful no matter how my job is going. No need to worry about work dreams, because my home dreams have already come true.

Anna's embrace is also a foreshadowing of God's embrace. I can't earn or deserve His love either. Like my wife, my Lord freely, liberally, and enthusiastically demonstrates His love. God's Son gave His life for us and offers us an abiding relationship greater than anything on earth. Greater than a shaky hug. Greater than being twirled or carried. Even greater than a tip-toe embrace.

God also can't wait for us to come "home." One day, all of God's children will enjoy His embrace in a grand heaven reunion. But until then, I get to enjoy a daily foreshadowing of that grand day with my wife's embrace. Then again, **the best way for kids to want to be faithful to a loving God is for them to see Dad be faithful to a loving Mom.**

**Questions:** What or who gets your warmest embrace? If married, how are you embracing your spouse today? If a Christian, how are you embracing your Lord?



## **How My Wife Got a Trophy Husband**

“How’d you do it?” I can only imagine how often my wife hears that question, along with, “How did you get a trophy husband?” Maybe not those exact words, but that’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

Well, if you know us, you’d know the irony of that idea. You’d know I’m not younger than Anna; we were born on the same day. You’d know she didn’t get a looker; she got a man who loves looking at her. She didn’t marry a model or a bodybuilder; she helped me become a role model who builds a family. And she didn’t want a man who loves making money; she wanted a man who loves giving money away. Thankfully, not even my baldness or bad jokes deter her from seeing me like any wife can see her own husband – as a trophy.

Anna didn’t marry a trophy husband. She created one, largely by choosing to see me as one. Having a trophy husband has little to do with your man; instead, it has everything to do with you and how you live out I Peter 3:1 – transforming him through your pure, respectful behavior. It’s making him feel like a trophy husband, which causes him to treat you like a trophy wife. Here are five tips to help virtually any wife get a trophy husband without replacing the one you already have.

### **5 tips to get a trophy husband (without replacing the one you have)**

#### **1. See him like a trophy husband**

First, see your man as a prized trophy long before he’s much more than a participation trophy. Imagine what he can be, not who he is. See in him what you want him to see in you. And believe the best when his best isn’t that great. Although “seeing is believing” applies in many areas, don’t use it here . . . or you’ll likely get a husband who participates, but rarely serves and leads.

#### **2. Treat him like a trophy husband.**

If you want your man to be a trophy, lift him up like a trophy. Display him like you won him and want to show him off. Not because he’s earned it, but because he’s learned it from you. Sadly, atrophy of relationships is a common result when men aren’t treated like a trophy. Nope, it’s not fair, but if you don’t help your husband with proactivity, your marriage will likely shrivel up from inactivity.

### **3. Trust him like a trophy husband**

Trust is like faith – “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Sometimes, you have to trust your husband when there’s little evidence and even less hope. Will you risk believing in him even when you can’t see it in him? Getting trophies involves taking risks. So when he messes up, don’t bust him. Trust him.

### **4. Speak about him like a trophy husband**

One of the best gifts you can give your kids is saying great things about your husband, especially when he messes up. Instead of nagging on his faults, negate his faults with encouraging words. Virtually nothing makes a trophy shine like polishing. So too, your husband is a reflection of your countenance. What do you see when you look at him? If you’ll keep polishing him, he’ll reflect your joy.

### **5. Pray for him like a trophy husband**

The best way to get a trophy husband, though, is to pray for him. Ask God to re-engage you with the man who asked you to get engaged to him. Prayer changed things because it moves the heart of God, who moves the hearts of men. No amount of logic, crying, begging, or guilt can change a husband’s hard heart. But prayer can. Don’t put prayer on the shelf like a dusty old trophy. Get it out and buff it until your husband shines like the day he asked you to marry him.

## **Trophy love**

That’s “trophy love” – treating your spouse like a trophy no matter how they respond. Trophy love sees beyond today’s reality. It treats well regardless of what’s earned. It trusts despite little evidence. It speaks grace when your spouse can’t hear. And it prays, believing God can and will. Trophy love also helps your kids make the most important decision of their lives – to become God’s trophy by receiving His gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**Questions:** Ladies, how can you help your husband believe he’s a trophy? And, men, how can you help your wife believe it’s worth her effort to try?



## **10 Tips to Stay Married to a Model – part 1**

Jackpot! You married the girl of your dreams . . . a model, at least that’s how you saw her. But now, years later, you’ve gained more than just wisdom. You’ve also gained a few wrinkles and a few pounds. But not your “model” wife, right? (The correct answer is: RIGHT!)

The issue for most men isn’t how to get a girl. It’s how to keep her happy. Happy wife, happy life isn’t just a pithy phrase; it’s proven philosophy. But a happy wife is often harder to find than Waldo because men look for the wrong things – for what men want, not what their wives want.

### **2 things your wife needs**

No one told me when I young, so I had to learn the hard way about two truths that can keep the girl of your dreams happy . . . insights into what she secretly needs . . . common sense that sadly isn’t so common. These two truths are that your wife needs to feel: 1) attractive and 2) secure.

In the next blog, we’ll explore 5 tips to help your model wife feel secure. But here are 5 tips to help see why, for example, my wife still often takes an hour to get ready in the morning (not five minutes like me) . . . why, after 37 years of marriage, my wife still lights up when I say she’s pretty . . . why she works hard to look good even though I think she’s gorgeous.

My wife’s inner beauty was obvious when I met her, but her little cheerleader outfit didn’t hurt either. Just sayin.’ But knowing that I still think she’s pretty is important to her. And every husband knows that’s true. How, though, do you help your model momma receive it? Here are 5 tips to help.

### **5 tips to help her feel attractive**

#### **1. See her as a model**

Men, your wife’s perception of her beauty starts with you. After my deep-thinking son broke up with a model, I said, “Son, you need to make a list, a very short list, of the things that you must have in a wife. Not the things you prefer to have. Just the very few non-negotiables that you *must* have in a spouse. One of those things for you is that she must think deep, like you. And another one is that you have to think she’s hot.”

So why should a dad tell his son to marry a pretty girl? Because his wife will never believe she's pretty if he doesn't believe it. And if he doesn't believe it then, what will happen when years pass and appearances change? I wasn't telling him to pursue vanity; I was preparing him to connect with what's inside and adore what's outside, no matter how she looks. Then again, I've learned that even when my wife doesn't feel pretty, she'll believe it if I do.

## **2. Tell your kids she's hot.**

At my parents' 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I told my mom something that my kids will never forget: "Mom, when I looked for a wife, I looked for someone just like you, except hot." Although my mom is beautiful in every way, no boy thinks his mom is hot. Still, I've never stopped telling my kids that my wife is hot. For years they got grossed out (one of the joys of parenting!), but as they matured, my kids loved it. And my sons now do the same with their wives.

So why should a dad tell his kids that their mom is hot? Because I want to adorn them with the jewel of knowing I'll always love my wife (Ephesians 5:22). No need to trade her in for a newer, shiny model because I already have one. Still, thinking it isn't enough. For my sons to do the same with their wives, they needed to constantly hear it, along with the next tip – constantly see it.

## **3. Woo her long after winning her.**

Nearly every guy works hard to win a girl's heart, but few work hard to keep it. Her heart is a treasure, not a trophy. A true treasure is pursued, discovered, and cherished for a lifetime. A trophy, on the other hand, is won, set on a shelf, and soon ignored while you pursue the next trophy.

To woo someone is to zealously seek their affection and favor. Initially, I wooed Anna to win her. But I'm learning to not wane in wooing, even though I've won her affection and favor for a lifetime. Yes, I still do stupid things. We all make withdrawals from our spouse's emotional bank account. But are you still wooing her long after winning her?

## **4. Buy flowers when it counts most**

Few things drain a couple's mojo like using affection as a transaction. He gives love to earn her sex. She gives sex to earn his love. It's a vicious cycle leading to a slow, stealthy death. No wonder divorces most often happen in year 7 or 8. They transact. They exchange. They trade. They swap. They take turns, without ever truly becoming one.

That's why I started routinely buying flowers for Anna, but kept the reason a secret. She loved those flowers, but I finally told her my secret – I bought them when she was on her period. Why? Because it couldn't possibly be a transaction. I bought them when they counted the most . . . when I couldn't get anything back, except a joy-filled wife who loved me even more.

## **5. Be manly, not macho**

In one of the most shocking aha moments of my life, I learned that girls want manly, not macho. Whew! I had a shot. Before then, I believed the lie that women want burly. So I lifted weights and acted tough. Sure, a guy's appearance can help or hurt his cause, but, far more, Anna wanted me to make her laugh, share her life passions, connect with her heart, and act like a man.

Anna wishes that I loved what she loves – Hallmark movies, use both sides of my brain simultaneously, and cry at the drop of a hat. But God didn't wire me that way. Anna wants those things, but she *needs* a godly husband who complements and completes her like God intended.

Then again, everyone can be a model. Maybe not photographed for a career, but everyone can model what it's like to know they're adored by God and adorned with the jewel of His blessings. We can believe it because God believes it, and because we know that: He sees us as His model; He tells us so in the Bible; He keeps on wooing us; He gives us what we need when it counts most; and His Son showed us how to be manly, not macho.

**Questions:** Husbands, what are you doing to help your wife feel attractive, while not tying her worth to physical appearance? Wives, how are you making it easy for your man to see your inner beauty, not just your outer beauty?





## 10 Tips to Stay Married to a Model – part 2

Be careful what you wish for. Many a man marries a hot girl, but gets a hot mess. Instead of wondering what's wrong with her, though, he should first look at himself.

Too often, he's made one of two fatal mistakes. Either he stopped convincing her that he thinks she's attractive, or he stopped helping her feel secure. Or both. It's not even that he did something terribly wrong. He could have simply not proactively done what she needs to believe it. And nearly every wife, no matter how attractive she may be, needs to feel secure.

Last time, we reviewed 5 tips to stay married to a model by helping her feel attractive. This blog provides 5 more model-worthy tips that give her an overwhelming sense of security. Yes, this involves physical and financial security, but we'll unpack 5 tips for the emotional security she needs just as much. For to stay married to the model you knew you couldn't live without, you need to give her the security she can't live without.

### 5 tips to help her feel secure

#### 1. Prioritize her, even over your kids

If a man learns one thing about his wife's need for security, let it be that she *knows* that she's his #1 priority after God. More than work. More than success. More than the kids. You sacrifice so much for kids, but kids need to understand how priorities cascade to them. Dad's love for God overflows to his love for Mom, which, in turn, overflows to kids. God – 1; Mom – 2; Kids – 3.

When a man desperately loves his Lord and his wife, he's modeling God's priorities: "Husbands, love your wife, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph 5:25).

#### 2. Be her defender

Nobody messes with my wife. Not even my kids. Why? Because I'm her defender. Anna's biggest threat to our kids was "wait 'til your father comes home!" It was the spousal version of what happened when a teacher threatened my daughter. They begged me to not confront the teacher. Seriously?! I was nice, but let's just say that the teacher and her boss understood how that could never happen again! Why? Because I'm my family's defender, starting with my wife.

Defending my wife also includes defending her heart, which starts with defending my purity. I also defend my time, especially at work. And I defend her from big things (like not reliving painful memories) and things that seem small (like killing spiders) because they help her feel secure.

### **3. Brag about her behind her back**

Security is all about trust. If you want your wife's unquestioned trust, profusely brag about her behind her back. I've heard countless friends and coworkers complain about their wives. It's like a competition of whose wife harps most. I get it. But I have two words for you: Stop it!

But what if your wife isn't the sweetest person you know? It doesn't matter. You're called to be the biblical leader of your home. Find what's already praiseworthy about her and brag on that. Constantly. Sincerely. Clandestinely. And although she won't hear every compliment behind her back, she'll hear nuggets and feel the security of being cared for and validated.

### **4. Honor her family**

Sure, you love your wife, but what about her family? It's not enough to put up with them. You must honor them, even when it's the last thing you want to do. Why? Because she'll gain something else she needs – certainty. For if you'll love her family, regardless of their quirks, you'll certainly love her despite any of her quirks. I'm not talking about trust. Trust is earned, but honor is given. You don't even have to trust her family, but you certainly need to honor them.

It's a practical example of how God designed marriage. We leave parents and cleave to each other (Gen 2:24), but we can't abandon, disrespect, and stop loving parents. Period. So even though mother-in-law jokes can be funny, those seeds turn into thorns, without the roses.

### **5. Use a communication recipe**

5 cups of listening, 2 cups of vulnerability, and a dash of explaining. That's a recipe for how I want to communicate with my wife. Everyone has an unwritten recipe they know they should follow, but few actually do. Instead, we use too much explaining – a recipe for humble pie.

Great security requires great communication. Open. Honest. Vulnerable. Discerning. Inquisitive. Caring. Personalized. All are important ingredients for creating favorite family recipes. Ironically, I call Anna "the master of the simple recipe" because she turns simple food recipes into great meals. So too, her simple ways of communicating help me want to secure her with love.

Questions: Men, how are you prioritizing, defending, bragging, honoring, and communicating with your wife? How well are you giving her feel the security she needs? Ladies, how can you communicate so that he doesn't have to read your mind on how to meet those needs?

# **GENEROSITY**





## **When God Refused to Be Outgiven**

I'd heard that you can't outgive God. In August 1984, I saw how that's true.

As a recent college graduate, I had seen God's favor. He had blessed with a wife and a job that humanly speaking were beyond my reach. Then I passed the CPA exam in one attempt (98% failed the first time) and received a \$300 bonus – a ton of money back then, at least to me.

Knowing well my famous frugality, Anna pounced on this unexpected influx of cash, lobbying for a TV. And not just any TV. She wanted a *color* TV?! Seriously? That could cost \$100 or even the entire \$300 for a nice one. Well, a TV had to wait because God impressed me to give that \$300 back to Him. So I did and saw God refuse to be outgiven.

I had our church give \$100 each to our three ministers, including Kent, our Youth Pastor (a friend from college). A few days later, I got a frantic call from Kent and his wife, Vonda, to go to their apartment. In tears, Kent and Vonda shared their story . . . they were desperate because they needed \$100 immediately. So they had cried out to God and trusted Him to provide. And immediately thereafter, they received an anonymous gift from the church of exactly \$100. They didn't know what to do, so they called us because they HAD to tell somebody and celebrate God's faithfulness. And, oh, what a gift back from God – seeing our friends' joy!

### **Lessons from giving**

To this day, Kent and Vonda never knew who gave that \$100 (well, they'll know now), but we all know our loving God answers prayers. And I learned two other lessons that I couldn't forget:

1. You can't outgive God.
2. God wants to use to answer other people's prayers.

By the way, Anna did eventually get a color TV (the \$100 kind), but she'll always remember how God used that little gift to stir our belief that He watches, He cares, and He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). In the many years since, I'm learning how generosity is about so much more than money. Generosity is the overflow of character. It's how we thank God for what He has

done, not how we grease the skids to get more. It's not an exchange with God; it's being a conduit of His blessings for others.

Generosity flows from full hearts that believe God loves you and believes in you. It's not name-it-and-claim-it, blab-it-and-grab-it, or believe-it-and-receive it. God invests in you and wants his investment back, with interest. That's why Jesus taught about the master who invested talents in three servants. The one unfaithful servant received his just reward – punishment. But the two faithful servants received even more talents, plus their master's praise and joy (Matthew 25:21).

Although Anna and I often fall short of God's standard of generosity, we've seen God miraculously use our gifts of money, time, and parenting training. Sometimes, we get back financial blessings, but normally not. And that's the best part – giving expecting nothing in return.

When you sacrificially give, you're acting like God the Father who "gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life" (John 3:16). You're serving like Jesus who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). And you're loving "Him because He first loved us" (I John 4:19).

God doesn't need your \$300, and you don't need a new color TV. But we need to see how God wants to use us to bless others. We need the joy of trying to outgive God, although He won't let that happen . . . just like He did that day with Kent and Vonda.

God gives back more than we could ever imagine in ways we couldn't imagine. His gifts may not be what the world wants, but it's exactly what we need. And it's what others need, if only we'll be conduits of God's blessings in doing what He created us to do – bring Him glory.

**Questions:** How have you seen God refuse to be outgiven? How could you sacrificially give back to Him? How has God used someone to be the answer to your prayers, and how have you been that for someone else?



## **The Best Gift a Dad Can Give His Kids**

It's not until you become a parent that you realize how much your parents give you. Looking back, I see how my mom has always given unending love, undeserved patience, and unmatched enchiladas. And my dad is still the most humble, giving man I know.

Despite few words, Dad's generosity spoke volumes. Whatever he had, he gave. To friends, Dad gave free repairs, financial sacrifices, yard work, anything to bless them. To his kids, though, he also gave something else . . . the best gift a dad can give his kids – he loved his wife.

As a kid, I didn't think much about it. I assumed all dads loved their wives. I couldn't imagine any other way. But I grew to realize that Dad's love of Mom was more than a biblical mandate. It was his gift to his kids.

Like my dad, I'm no marriage expert. But my kids know that, other than loving God, loving their mom is my #1 gift to them. Sure, Anna and I fed and clothed our kids. We changed diapers and changed attitudes. Encouraged and challenged. Listened and taught. Still, other than helping my kids choose saving faith for themselves, my main focus as a dad was loving my wife.

Therefore, the following note from my son was one of the greatest compliments I've ever received:

“I admire how you love and seek Mom. I never doubted your love for her. You made sure we knew it too, something most kids never get to see. You would come home, flowers in hand, surprising Mom as she bursts into a huge smile. It was a blessing having that consistency and example in my life.”

My goal was to be like my dad, who was more than just a great role model. Dad was real. Unwavering in love, unpretentious in spirit, and uncompromising in principles. Here are five tips to help any father become a real dad who consistently gives his kids the gift of loving his wife.

## **5 gift-giving tips for loving your wife**

### **1. Share your heart**

Real dads are transparent without losing their manhood. They connect where their wife lives by sharing their heart, expecting nothing in return. Nothing hurts my wife quite like when I shut down and don't tell her what I'm thinking. She doesn't need an expert communicator to be happy, but she needs a willing communicator. And a happy wife doesn't guarantee a happy life . . . but it sure helps.

### **2. Sacrifice your treasure**

The test of a real dad isn't the dream he'll pursue to be happy; it's the dream he'll sacrifice to be faithful. Many dads give their best at work, but give leftovers at home. Giving leftovers, though, isn't giving. Giving is sacrificing. It costs time and effort. Money also isn't the issue; meaningfulness is. What Momma truly wants is sacrifice that demonstrates real love.

### **3. Surrender your pride**

Real dads are stubborn with standards, yet harmonious with humility. Let's face it, men are proud creatures who want respect, even more than love (Eph. 5:33). Add to that a desire for strength, power, and control, and it's no wonder why many marriages struggle. Momma doesn't need her man to act like her in order to connect with her. She needs him to surrender his pride, so that he never gives up on her.

### **4. Shower your generosity**

Real dads live in abundance, not scarcity. Whether financially rich or poor, he showers his family with generosity – the overflow of character. They don't hoard. They give. Freely. Joyfully. Immediately. Continually. Liberally. Not a sprinkling, spattering, or smidge. A real dad's love for his wife is a showering, a downpour, a flood of infectious thankfulness that Momma adores every day and kids learn to appreciate one day.

### **5. Sharpen your bond**

Real dads never stop pursuing their wives. Like sharpening a pencil, they always have a point – loving their kids well by loving their wife well. Too many men pursue a woman to marry, yet spend their lives chasing other pursuits. You're not giving up your dreams; you're dreaming of a godly family secure in dad's unwavering, unpretentious, uncompromising love.

In conclusion, kids need to that mom is #1, not them. In addition to a dad who loves them, they need a mom who feels loved by dad. Then kids will know how to love and receive love – a far greater gift than fancy clothes, fast cars, or financial inheritances . . . a gift they can never repay except to give it to their own kids one day.

**Questions:** Dad, in which of these 5 tips are you the best and in which needs the most improvement? Mom, how can you make it easier for him to become a dad whose kids want to be like him one day?



## **The Best Gift a Mom Can Give Her Kids**

With my best British accent, I asked my wife: “If I call you, ‘My laaady,’ would you call me, ‘My looord?’” Without hesitation, Anna replied, “Aaahh, NO!”

Although never dubbed “my lord,” I’ve been blessed with something far greater. It’s politically unpopular, yet biblically brilliant . . . something my wife gives our kids and my mom gave me . . . the best gift any mom can give her kids – respecting her husband.

Granted, every child desperately needs a mother’s love. Anna’s love is priceless and irreplaceable. Anna’s respect, though, shaped our family in ways nothing else can. For example, it encouraged me to love and lead, it prepared our kids to have a reverence for God, and it forged our kids’ view of what healthy families should look like.

God’s recipe for healthy families is dads who love and moms who respect: “Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33). Everyone wants both, so why this recipe? Because women tend to give what they need most (love), not what men need most (respect). Vice versa for men. But that doesn’t have to be your family.

Even if you’ve never seen this kind of respect modeled, it can be your family’s legacy too when given generously. Here are three ways to help mom give this priceless gift to her husband, along with three ways dad can receive it.

### **3 ways mom can give respect to her husband**

#### **1. Embrace the need**

Whether dad deserves respect or not isn’t the question. The question is if mom embraces the fact that he needs it. Unfortunately, many wives treat respect like sex – a reward for good behavior. Early on, Anna attended a women’s conference that said husbands leave wives for women who will embrace his need for respect. Is this fair? Excusable? No way! We can’t control what our spouse embraces, but we can embrace a husband’s need for respect and a wife’s need for love.

## **2. Imagine the blessing**

Biblical respect, like any transformation, starts with imagining a better future. If he doesn't love you like you imagined, start respecting him like he never imagined. Even if he doesn't respond in kind, your respect will bless your kids with a whole new view of God and family.

## **3. Believe it's worth it**

Sadly, too few women have seen this modeled. Thus, it's hard to believe it's worth it. Respecting him doesn't guarantee he'll give you the love you need. But not respecting him will nearly guarantee that he won't reciprocate. Thankfully, even stubborn men are often softened: "So that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence in your lives" (I Peter 3:1-2).

## **3 ways dad can receive respect from his wife**

### **1. Give unconditional love**

Your family needs dad to give love. Unexpected love, not reciprocated love. Whole-hearted love, not lukewarm love. Consistent love, not unpredictable love. Prioritized love, not leftover love. Treasured love, not white-elephant-passed-around love. They need dad's unconditional love that is undeniably remembered and unashamedly copied.

### **2. Give undeserved respect**

A basic rule of leadership is: if you want something, give it first. If you want respect, give it. Don't demand it, expect it, or make others earn it in order to get yours. Freely give undeserved respect and watch your family slowly change for the better, no matter how they respond right away.

### **3. Give unending relationships**

It's been said that "relationship" is the most important word in the English language. Your wife may forget a birthday present, but she'll always cherish your unending, everyday relationship with her. Like love and respect, deep family connections cost you something and involve everything, but they're worth anything.

Then again, Jesus is the ultimate bridegroom who gives love, respect, and relationships to His bride – the church. Jesus didn't wait for his bride to treat Him properly. He gave first. He gave fully, joyfully, and continually so that we can see what healthy looks like in His family . . . and so that we will rightly call him, "My Lord."

**Questions:** How healthy is your family? How can you encourage your family to love and lead, prepare them to revere God, and shape their view of a healthy family?



## **The Best Gift Kids Can Give Parents**

Oh, the whoopin' that is parenting. Exhausted from endless whining, we've all resorted to "because I said so." But we don't have to live there. We can't live there . . . if we want whining kids to become winning adults.

Kids need our provision and protection, but they need something even greater. Kids need us to give them a gift . . . a gift they'll never request. Too often, we parents demand this gift from our kids, yet don't give it to them first so that they can, in turn, return it to us and God. It's the greatest gift every child can give his or her parents – honorable obedience.

Godly legacies need honorable obedience because it prepares kids to do the same with God. How we obey God determines how our kids know to obey us. Yes, kids make their own choices, but our honorable obedience makes theirs possible. It's the third ingredient of God's recipe for godly families: dads who love, moms who respect, and kids who honorably obey.

Honor and obedience – doing the right thing at the right time with the right heart for the right reason – are God's inseparable conjoined twins that endear His blessing. For example, Ephesians 6:1-2 states: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise."

Jesus, the ultimate role model, had honorable obedience that didn't just fix His disciples' behavior; He also funneled their beliefs. Here are five tips to help you honorably obey God so that your kids can more honorably obey both God and you.

## **5 tips to help your kids honorably obey**

### **1. Model obedience**

God adores obedience, even more than sacrifice (I Sam 15:22, Prov 21:3). Jesus wanted relief from the cross, yet He chose obedience (Luke 22:42). He modeled it for us so that we can model it for our kids. Then again, kids rarely rise above the leadership they see modeled at home. If our kids' obedience to us is a reflection of how we obey God, what should we expect of them?

### **2. Listen proactively**

Kids need us to listen to them, which opens them up to us. Even more, though, they need us to listen to God. If we will, our kids will know it. Our character, countenance, and conduct will show it. Kids need us to proactively listen to their requests in the same way that God listens to ours (I Pet 3:12, I John 5:15, Jer 29:12-13).

### **3. Respect boundaries**

We push boundaries as adults because we did the same as kids. When parents push God's boundaries, though, it's a recipe for kids' rebellion. Achan pushed God's boundaries, and his kids paid the penalty (Joshua 7). That's why my favorite poem is one my daughter, Leslie, wrote to God. Leslie (my little boundary pusher as a kid) had grown to tell God: "Your boundaries are my meadow in which to run."

### **4. Apologize quickly**

We all blow it sometimes. When our authenticity and integrity wane, there's only one good option – apologize quickly. Not begrudgingly, hesitantly, or partially. Neither God nor kids respond well to excuses, but kids love seeing our woes become God's wows by apologizing quickly, sincerely, and transparently (II Chron 7:14, II Kings 20).

### **5. Remember why**

The most powerful human force in the universe is an undaunted, divine why. Like the Prodigal Son, returning to our why can overpower years of wandering. And like the Prodigal's brother, we need it to overcome frustration after serving faithfully for years (Luke 15:11-32). If we'll serve and obey God, we'll prepare our kids to choose a similar why (Josh 24:14-15).

God commands kids to obey their parents, which lengthens their lives (Ex 20:12), pleases Him (Col 3:20), and is right (Eph 6:1). But God wants more than blind, mindless compliance. He wants honorable obedience – submission grounded in love and respect for Him. It's a command by God with eternal blessings, not a commandeering demand by parents.

God also must wonder sometimes why raising His kids is such a whoopin.' Thankfully, He sees the big picture we can't. Therefore, God puts up with a lot of endless whining so that He can turn us into eternal winners.

**Questions:** In which of the 5 tips – model, listen, respect, apologize, and remember – do you need the most improvement? Which tip do your kids need the most for you to model with excellence?



## **The Best Gift You Can Regift**

Last week, our family, like yours, tore into wrapped Christmas gifts with oohs and aahs like a Wheel of Fortune episode. COVID, however, cancelled our much-anticipated white elephant gift exchange – a chance to regift previously-received, yet unused, gifts.

This year, though, I want to regift something COVID can't cancel, something people are more open to receive now because of COVID. Everyone secretly wants it, desperately needs it, and silently hopes to receive it. It's the best present you can regift on Christmas Day and every day – true sacrifice.

The true test of what you value is what you'll sacrifice to have. Paul Kimball sacrificed his career to teach students like me in college. The Apostle Paul sacrificed everything to preach the gospel. My dad sacrificed his time to meet people's mechanical and electrical needs. All three sacrificed greatly because they greatly valued the God they serve. They loved the giftedness that God gave them, so they gladly regifted it. Here are five ways that you too can regift Jesus' sacrifice for your loved ones.

### **5 ways to regift true sacrifice**

#### **1. Sacrifice your wants for their needs**

If you want to benefit someone, share your passions and giftedness with them. But if you want to transform their future, sacrifice what you want in order to meet their needs. True sacrifice, though, isn't free. It costs, even if money isn't involved. True sacrifice is what you'll agonize over, strive for, persist in, submit to, serve under, rise above, and persist through. Following Jesus' example, you gladly give away what you love to meet the needs of people you love even more.

#### **2. Sacrifice your sleep for their rest**

My wife can somehow go for weeks with little sleep in order to meet people's needs. Why? Because she's giving what she has been given – God's peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). By sacrificing sleep, she gives physical and emotional rest . . . rest that provides respite, love, and acceptance that come only from a giver who abides in the restful arms of Jesus.

### **3. Sacrifice your transparency for their connection**

Many people talk a lot, yet say little. They miss the point that people want to connect with you before connecting to your mission. People want to know you, especially the crises and challenges you've navigated. Transparently regifting the good and bad lessons you've learned can forge unforgettable connections . . . like beautifully wrapped gifts that are even better when opened and shared with others.

### **4. Sacrifice your plans for their purpose**

We all have plans. The question isn't how great they are or how well you accomplish them. It's how much you'll sacrifice your plans to help others fulfill their purpose. Don't push your plans on others; sacrifice your plans in order to put others on the path to faithfulness – for their good and God's glory. Then again, God's plan is to give you a future and hope (Jer. 29:11). And thankfully, as you make plans, He directs your steps (Prov. 16:9).

### **5. Sacrifice your time for their eternity**

Nothing speaks more about what you value than the time you sacrifice to prepare others for eternity. Society says education is the key to a brighter tomorrow, but education doesn't get you into heaven or crowns to lay at Jesus' feet. Only saving faith gets you in and only regifting God-given purpose gets you crowns to lay down. Sacrificial time is the gateway to helping others enjoy a bright eternity, as well as a brighter tomorrow.

Our sacrifices reflect Jesus, who sacrificed everything for us. He left heaven, was born of a virgin in a lowly manger, lived thirty years as a poor carpenter's son, and allowed Himself to be crucified. Even when he prayed to be spared from a crucifixion death, He sacrificed His wants for our needs, His sleep for our rest, His transparency for our connection, His plans for our purpose, and His time for our eternity. He did all this, while sacrificing His place in heaven, so that we can join Him there.

Too often, we treat God's gifts like a white elephant exchange – a chance to give away previously-received, yet unused, gifts. We trade our junk for someone else's. But not this year. This year, let's truly sacrifice. Let's regift all God has given us – the best gift possible for any loved one, for any occasion, on Christmas and every other day.

**Questions:** Who in your life has truly sacrificed so that you can have a bright tomorrow and a place in heaven? How can you do the same for your family and others?

**FAITHFULNESS**





## **Always We Trust**

With a world and a country in utter turmoil, we wonder what to do. The answer takes me back a decade ago to two conversations that forever changed my view of challenging times.

The first conversation was heart-wrenching. My good friend and co-worker, Lori, walked into my office in utter despair and cried out, “I’m desperate! Tim, you have to pray for my sister. She has cancer with only weeks to live. I’m so scared. We need a miracle. It’s our only hope!” So we did the only thing we could do in that dark moment – we prayed. And as best we could, we trusted God.

A couple weeks later, I was shocked at what happened next. Lori bounded into my office. With tears streaming and countenance glowing, she proclaimed, “Tim, guess what. My sister’s cancer is gone! Completely! The doctors can’t explain it, but we know why. It’s God! It’s totally God! He’s so amazing! Thank you so much for praying. Can you believe it?!”

After unashamedly praising God together, Lori left, and I sat in utter awe, silently pondering what had just happened. You hear about miracles like that, but this time, God let me be a partner in praying boldly for a miracle unexplainable by doctors.

Lori’s sister didn’t deserve terminal cancer nor did she earn miraculous healing. She was simply the beneficiary of God’s grace. She was proof that God is in control, and we are not.

I also learned another invaluable lesson that day . . . a lesson that still helps me find peace when the world, or at least my world, doesn’t make sense. God taught me that amidst both utter awe and utter desperation, we can hold to one constant – the character to trust. Therefore, I emailed Lori these thirteen words, which God has used to sustain me through my own trials over the years:

**Sometimes we stand in awe.  
Sometimes we kneel in desperation.  
Always we trust.**

We can’t control life, but we can trust God to walk with us. We can’t control our health, but we can trust God to heal us or to teach us what we need to get through it. And we can’t control a world and country in utter turmoil, but we can trust God, who puts rulers in place (Romans 13:1) and directs

their steps (Proverbs 16:9). For indeed, “The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1).

What we can trust, though, is the Creator, even if we can’t understand His creation. We can trust His answers, even if we can’t ask the right questions. And we can trust His lessons, even if we don’t have a clue what they may be. For when death knocks, cancer returns, money disappears, kids wander, spouses quit, friends betray, or leaders disappoint, we can do one thing . . . we can trust.

Trust sustains. Trust endures. Trust enlivens. Trust lifts. Trust cradles. Trust strengthens. Trust humbles. Trust inspires. And trust hones, especially when we don’t know what else to do.

So, what do we do when everything around us doesn’t make sense. We trust. Whether standing in awe or kneeling in desperation, we can live the truth of those three eternity-changing words:

**Always we trust.**

**Questions:** What should you surrender and start trusting God to control? Who in your world needs to know that you’re praying and trusting God to do what only He can do for them?



## **Kill ‘em with Kindness**

Falsely accused. Ever been there? Unable to fight back because you’d look defensive, you’re left to sink or slink away. The pain can be devastating. That was me in December 1989. But I learned a lesson that changed my life (and maybe can change yours too) . . .

### **Kill ‘em with kindness.**

My company sent me to Buffalo, New York in December. That should have been my first clue. I was given the unenviable task of doing a “quick review” of a major defense contract that was losing millions of dollars and no one knew why. Second clue.

After three days in Buffalo, something didn’t smell right. Their answers weren’t adding up. The next Monday, I got called into the executive suite of my boss’s boss’s boss in Dallas and asked, “Is everything OK? Is your marriage in trouble? What’s wrong?” Stunned, I asked why. All they said was that the Buffalo executives wanted me fired because I was “godlike, arrogant, and rude.”

Instead of being fired, I was sent back to Buffalo to dig deeper. Over the next few weeks, I found massive unreported cost and performance problems. The bosses of the Buffalo team now knew they’d been lied to . . . about the Buffalo division and about me.

Ah, the moment of truth. A month after nearly being fired, I sat in a meeting with muckety-mucks from across the country to discuss my findings. And I had a choice: Do I reciprocate and obliterate my false accusers? Or do I follow the advice of my dear friend, Dr. Nathan Jones – to kill ‘em with kindness? I had to choose between sweet revenge and sweet irony.

### **Sweet irony, not sweet revenge**

Despite my nature, I chose right and felt the inexplicable joy of sweet irony – giving grace to my accusers. Instead of grinding my accusers into dust (like I wanted), I thanked them and then factually unpacked the reality of their operations. The Dallas CFO, who had believed his team’s accusations and tried to get me fired, created a job for me with a huge promotion.

Unfortunately, sweet irony doesn’t always turn out so well. But how often do we miss the joy of giving undeserved grace because we want sweet revenge? God modeled undeserved grace by sacrificing His

Son for our salvation. Now His nature can be ours. He didn't wait for us to deserve His grace; He died for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 6:23). And while dying, He sought grace for His accusers: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Because Jesus has "killed us with kindness," so can we. Here are 4 steps to help you do the same.

## **4 steps to kill 'em with kindness**

### **1. Remember your nature**

Before jumping at the chance to avenge, remember who you were without Christ and, sadly, who you sometimes are with Him. As Jesus said to accusers of the alleged adulteress in John 8:7: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Don't blame lost people for acting lost. Love them. Lead them. Show them the sweet irony of Christ's grace.

### **2. Release your anger**

Choose to be free. Don't be a victim. Don't let someone else's actions or attitudes determine yours. Be openhanded with anger. Let it go. Don't clutch it like a prized possession. Release it. Let anger flow through your fingers like water, cleansing you from its ugly stains.

### **3. Replace loathing with loving**

There's no room in your heart for both loathing and loving. Pick one, the right one. Love conquers all. It's patient and kind. It doesn't envy or boast. It's not arrogant, rude, irritable, or resentful (1 Cor. 13:4-6) You can't hate someone and humbly pray for them because love can't coexist with hate. "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses (Proverbs 10:12).

### **4. Run to reconciliation**

Like the father of the prodigal son, run to reconciliation (Luke 15:20). Don't wait for others to ask for forgiveness. Be proactive. Be like our Savior. "So far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people" (Romans 12:18). No, you can't force others to reconcile, but you can run to the possibility. You can take the first step. You can forgive 70 x 7 times without keeping score (Matthew 18:22). For just as God runs to reconcile with us, let's run to others.

No, killing 'em with kindness isn't natural. But God didn't save us to be natural. God saved us to free us from the chains of wanting sweet revenge against others and experience the sweet irony of His unmerited grace.

Then again, Matthew 7:1-2 was, is, and always will be true: "Judge not, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged." Even in December. Even in Buffalo.

**Questions:** Have you ever been falsely accused? If so, will you release it and run to reconciliation? And is there anyone hoping that you'll do that for them.



## **Letting God Get Personal**

Imagine. Just imagine God writing you a personal letter. Not a form letter or a group email. Instead, God tells an angel, “Grab a pen and take down a letter for one of my children” . . . and that child of God is YOU.

Pouring out His heart, God shares some of the reasons He absolutely adores you. He describes how you bring Him joy and how you bless people. But His letter tells it like it is, so it also includes something else – things about you that God can’t stand.

Granted, God doesn’t use letters or stone tablets any more, but He still reveals His heart through the Bible, the Spirit’s prompting, and discerning believers. And although God absolutely adores you, He doesn’t pound down the door and barge into your life. Instead, He knocks. He waits. He yearns. And when you open the door, He comes in and fellowships with you (Revelation 3:20). Still, I can only imagine what a letter from God to me would say.

### **What would a personal letter from God say about you?**

What good deeds of yours would God commend, and what flaws would He rebuke? As my dear friend, Gary Stowe, recently reminded me, that’s what God did for the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. And Gary issued a challenge to our connection class at Cross City Church: to write the letter that God would write to you if you were one of those seven early churches.

I knew it would be convicting, but I’m sharing my letter with you because of one reason – a lesson I learned while serving parents at church: Get personal because it opens hearts.

Getting personal with God lets God get personal in your heart. And by letting people know the real you, you open their hearts to the God in your heart. Here’s what God put in my heart when I dug deeper to know His heart . . .

### **God’s letter to me**

“To Tim Alba, I write: These are the words of the Abiding One who gave Himself to save you, as well as to love you, live in you, and bless through you. You avoid many bad things.

You don't disqualify yourself. You lead your family, church, and career with courage and care. You are passionate and purposeful in whatever you put your hand to do.

"But this I have against you. You are busy. You are driven to learn and achieve, even for My namesake, yet too often you serve from your own strength, not mine. You push, rather than pull from me. You empty yourself, but miss My filling.

"I love your doing, but do this first – love Me. Abide in Me. Draw from Me. Reflect My joy. Rest in My balance. Sip slowly from My well. Trust My plan. Then you can encourage others from My overflow, give via My abundance, see through My eyes, cry with My afflicted, and pour forth My heart.

"Behold, I stand, longing for the intimacy of your embrace. Every day. Every hour. Every moment. I want your heart, not just your hand. I want your attention, not just your intention. I want you. When you do, I'll be here. For I not only yearn for the prodigal child to come home to Me, but I also yearn for the performing child to be truly present here with Me.

"He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to you, My beloved child."

## **Letting God get personal with you**

God wants to use you, but He also wants fellowship with you. He wants to reveal His Son's sacrifice and saving power through you if you'll let Him get personal to you. Just imagine His intimacy, His encouragement, His challenge. Then, and only then, are you and I able to do better . . . because we aren't performing for God; we're reforming for Him.

Wherever you are and whatever you're going through, take Gary's challenge to let God get personal with you. Write the letter that God would write to you if you were one of those seven early churches in Revelation. Like God did for those churches, let God reveal these five things to you:

- How God would describe Himself
- How God would commend you
- How God would rebuke you
- How God would encourage you
- What God would promise you

**Questions:** How can you let God get more personal with you? If God were to describe you right now, what would He say? What do you wish He could say about you?



## **Give a Tribute Before It's a Eulogy**

Happily married 37 years. Joyfully, actually. So why do I still express my admiration to Anna? After all, she knows how I feel. Well, it's for the same four reasons we should keep articulating appreciation for any loved one . . . four reasons I learned as a boy at, of all places, funerals.

### **Eulogy lessons**

As the son of an organ-playing mom, I'd roll my eyes, shrug my shoulders, and get dragged off in my "Sunday" clothes to yet another funeral of some old person I didn't know. Although I hated those countless funerals as a kid, they revealed something that I understood later as a minister – the difference it makes when loved ones have already expressed their appreciation for one another.

Sadly, many eulogies are a struggle because they've never before thought about why they love that person. But I'm not preparing you to eulogize people when they die; I'm challenging you to give them tributes when they're alive. In fact, here are four compelling reasons to give a tribute to family and friends long before it's a eulogy.

### **4 compelling reasons for tributes**

#### **1. Others need to hear it**

No matter how much people may know they're loved, there's just something about being told why. Not just loved in general, but they want to know the personal specifics that flavor your unique relationship. Although some people have a special gift of giving encouragement, everyone needs the gift of being encouraged. Therefore, you can be the answer to someone's need for encouragement.

#### **2. You need to say it**

As much as others need to hear it, you need to say it. You need the joy of expressing love . . . thinking it through, writing it down, and sharing it. Regardless of your lack of eloquence, it will change lives, starting with yours. And like any expression of true love, its effects depend on the grace in which it's given, not the worthiness of the persons receiving it.

### **3. Kids need to see it**

One of the greatest gifts you can give your kids is seeing mom and dad praise others. Kids are always watching, always learning, always shaping habits based largely on what they see in you. Kids tend to reflect what they learn to expect from you.

What do your kids expect from you? Yes, you praise your kids, but do they see you praise people who don't deserve it? No matter how crazy society gets, you will always be the #1 molder of your kids' hearts. Thus, kids need to see you give tributes, not blame.

### **4. God wants to use it**

God not only wants you, He also wants to use you for His glory. Oh how God loves for us to consider all He does for us and give Him tribute. Not vague, impersonal words. He wants thoughtful, unashamed praise from our deepest soul.

But oh how God also loves for us to consider all that other people do for us and praise them too. For when we do, we're doing what God created us to do – give praise – but, in this case, for people He died to save, which also brings Him glory.

Yes, others need to hear it, you need to say it. Kids need to see it. And God wants to use it. But will you do it? Who in your life could use an insightful, personal, caring word of praise? Family members, teachers, ministers, friends, or people who invested in you and your family? Whoever they are, I encourage you to join me in a tribute challenge. . .

### **A tribute challenge**

I will send a tribute email to one person per week for the next three months. That's 13 tributes. It's easy to think of 13 people who have blessed me. The hard part is narrowing it down (but, hey, I don't have to stop at 13).

How about you? Will you join me in giving tributes to loved ones? Don't wait until it's too late. Relationships can sour. Situations can change. People can die. Don't look back and say, "I wish I would have thanked them and told them what they mean to me when I still had the chance." Bless them with a tribute now. Knowing it is one thing, but writing and saying it will change your relationships, your heart, your kids, and your intimacy with God.

Then again, God also knows how you feel about Him, but He never tires of hearing how you love Him. Let's never stop telling Him.

**Questions:** If a deceased loved one could hear your eulogy of them, would they be surprised? Is there anything you want to tell a loved one today? Don't wait. Tell them today.



## **How Apologies Triumph Over Anger**

“How dare you!” In a moment of outrage, we lash out, responding to outrageously hurtful comments. We’ve all been there. One of life’s biggest challenges isn’t how to get others to stop being hurtful; it’s how to respond in love.

Like many teenagers, I had anger issues. The smallest offense sent me into a frenzy. After a particularly embarrassing episode in ninth grade, though, I prayed that God would remove my anger. And He did. As a recovering perfectionist (a #1 in Enneagram), I still struggle at times, but anger no longer controls me. Still, there are times when a bit of the old Tim comes out.

### **A bit of the old Tim**

Chances are, there’s a bit of the old you still in you too, no matter how long you’ve been a Christian. And a little of the old Tim came out when my co-worker, Russell, barked at me, “Doesn’t it ever cross your mind that all this religion is just a pile of XXXX?!”

Although I didn’t reciprocate Russell’s venom, my heart and tone were anything but gracious. I was proud of what I didn’t say! Well, a few days later in church, it was as if Jimmy Draper was preaching at just me, penetrating and convicting my deepest soul. He spoke about our hearts and the need to forgive people who have wronged us . . . to ask for their forgiveness.

What?! Russell is one who should apologize, right? Nope. I had to apologize to him, which I did the next day. And I’ll never forget the look on his face. Shocked. Dumbfounded, actually. He couldn’t believe I was sincerely asking for forgiveness due to my lack of grace, and promising to do better.

The point isn’t my apology; it’s that apologies can and do triumph over anger. At work. At home. At school. Anywhere. Apologies triumph, that is, if we’re trying to help others, not us. If we’re trying to feel better about ourselves, we naturally lash out and build walls. When we’re trying to bless the offender, though, our responses are very different. We’re unnatural and grace-filled. Here are a few questions that may help you too in triumphing over anger:

- Do I want to model being right, or model being righteous?
- Do I want to win today's trivial debate, or train tomorrow's winning disciple?
- Do I want to build my reputation of facts, or build relationships of faith?

For even if Russell hadn't been blown away by my apology, it was the right thing to do. It changed my life and, in turn, my kids' lives because I began learning the power of a sincere apology.

## **4 ways that sincere apologies triumph over anger**

### **1. Apologies turn negatives into vows**

Sincere apologies make memory tattoos – priceless memories that people can't forget and wouldn't want to. The worst negatives can become vows that leave the best marks. Even kids will forgive almost anything, other than a pattern of hypocrisy and a failure to try. And they forgive occasional lapses if followed by a sincere apology.

### **2. Apologies turn learning into leading**

Leaders take the sword, even when they're only 2 percent at fault. It shows strength, not weakness. They are quick to apologize and slow in having to. That is, true leaders work hard at not doing things that require apologies, but they look for reasons to apologize in order to lead well.

### **3. Apologies turn opposition into openness**

Sincere apologies are disarming. They inspire. They endear. They open up a whole new world of relationships by proving you care about others more than your pride. We all want to be around people who want better from themselves and better for us. Sincere apologies also open people to the faith that makes sincere apologies possible.

### **4. Apologies turn embarrassment into engagement**

Rather than languishing in embarrassment, live in the freedom of sincerely apologizing and leaning into the people whose trust you want to restore. You know you should do better but when you don't, run toward them, not away from them. Apologies enable both of you to stop looking back to the pain of broken relationships and start looking forward to the joy of restored relationships.

Although Russell passed away, I pray that God used my simple apology to touch his heart. Then again, we're not responsible for someone else's response, just ours. And when a bit of the old you shows up, let something else show up – a sincere apology. Don't live with regret. God really can heal you, but it starts by sincerely apologizing for your sins. Then He'll engage you, open your heart, lead you along a new path, and turn your old ways into a vow.

**Questions:** Like Brother Jimmy's sermon, whose life could be changed by a sincere apology from you? Will you ask God how He could use your humility to open someone else to Him?



## **Rust-less Treasures for Restless Families**

Families today are so busy. So tired. So restless. So full, yet wanting even more. Like shoehorning large feet into small shoes, we're forever forcing yet another activity into already crammed schedules. Maybe there's a better way.

Ironically, some of people have the simplest lives and the grandest treasures. They sacrifice the good to secure the great. Though rarely lacking for things to do, they do something that others lack – they store up rust-less treasures.

I've seen 500 impoverished Indian pastors risk their lives to attend a training event – to store up rust-less treasures. And I watched an old hopeless Kenyan woman build a fire and burn her only treasure – charms from a witch doctor – to trust a Savior she never before knew existed ... because this Jesus offered the hope of true treasures.

Matthew 6:20 says, “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” (NASB). If so, you're neither resting up nor rusting up. You're storing up.

Sometimes, we don't store up rust-less treasures because of neglect and inactivity (moths). Sometimes, it's a lack of vigilance and protection (thieves). But all too often, it's due to rust.

Rust often doesn't result from inactivity. As I learned in Iowa, busy cars can rust more than unused cars for two reasons: 1) excess exposure and 2) lack of prevention. So too, today's families often rust out because they're too busy, too exposed, and too unprotected. But this doesn't have to be *your* family! You can help your family experience rust-less treasures.

### **3 steps for restless families to store up rust-less treasures**

#### **1. Choose Your Treasures**

I named my first son Joshua for one reason – because the exodus hero, Joshua, said: “Choose for yourself today whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Rust-less legacies don't happen by default. We don't allow them; we must create them. They are the product of intentional parents, integrous character, and intriguing values.

Rust-less legacies start by choosing well. And choosing well starts with knowing God well and learning how He has gifted and impassioned you and your family for His glory.

## **2. Treasure Your Choices**

Choosing is great. But it's fruitless without the second step of storing up rust-less family treasures: treasuring your choices. You have to keep embracing them or they soon evaporate.

Rust-less treasures are like a great marriage. I love my bride more today than when we exchanged wedding vows. Why? Because we're still treasuring the commitment we made 37 years ago. Then again, the best way to prepare your kids to treasure God is for them to see you treasure your spouse. For although love isn't always an easy choice, it's a joyful choice when it reflects God's rust-less love.

## **3. Teach Your Treasures (Don't Keep Them a Secret)**

As my dear friend, Dianna Booher, says: "It's difficult to lead people to a place they cannot see, to an understanding you yourself do not have, to a goal you cannot communicate." She's so right.

You simply can't keep your family treasures a secret. If you don't articulate and communicate the legacy you want for your kids, how can they understand it? And if they don't understand it, how can they personalize it and pass it down in their own unique ways? We must instruct them as well as inspire them. Enlighten them and enliven them. Fuel them up and fire them up.

Yes, today's busy families need rest. But rest isn't the goal. Leading them to trust the God who loves them enough to die for them, live in them, and speak through them ... that's the goal. And that doesn't happen with too much rest. It happens when we aren't too busy, too exposed, and too unprotected to run back home to the Father who anxiously awaits our return.

Then again, our loving God sometimes allows us to have too little rest in order to ensure we don't have too much rust.

**Questions:** What treasures do you want to choose for your family? What can you do today to treasure those choices and teach them to your kids?

# **CULTURE**





## **How to Raise PG Kids in an R World – #1: Intriguing Plots**

Kids start out so innocent. Before you know it, though, they're saying inappropriate things in front of your friends. And you're left asking, "Where in the world did THAT come from?!"

The answer is often simple. Kids today live in an R world. My grandparents and parents lived in tough economic times, but had G values. My generation stealthily accepted a PG culture, which morphed into PG-13 for my kids. But wow that needle has swung, rocketed actually, to an R world.

Each generation complained about it, yet got unknowingly scalded like a frog in a slowly boiling pot. The progression is normally so slow that you don't see it or feel it. Nevertheless, it happens. And now the question for you and me is this: How do we raise PG kids in an R world?

In the next three blogs, we'll explore three keys to answer that question: 1) Intriguing Plots, 2) Memorable Characters, and 3) Clear Boundaries. We'll start today with Intriguing Plots.

### **4 ways to create Intriguing Plots at home**

#### **1. Answer your dramatic question**

Intriguing plots center around one moment that raises a dramatic question, which is answered throughout the story. Every dialog, every scene exists to answer that one question. How about you? What's your family's dramatic question?

Some families pursue rags-to-riches. Others' lives are a tragedy, hero's journey, comedy, or rebirth. Every family, including yours, has a story. But few families intentionally ask and answer a God-honoring dramatic question. If you want to raise PG kids who stand out in an R world, lead them to know the one thing that guides their every dialog, every victory, every disappointment.

My dramatic question is: Will my choices today result in feeling God's warm embrace and hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? That's mine ... What's yours?

## **2. Know your villains**

There's always a struggle between good and evil, between heroes and villains. And great families, like great movie plots, clearly know their villains. They don't create imaginary villains or villainize people to make a point. But they understand, identify, and protect against a spiritual enemy that comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

Sadly, many Christians live with the consequences of not understanding their spiritual enemy. Some are unaware, cocky, or indifferent. Others live with the opposite extreme – fear. Great families, however, protect against their enemy by submitting to God (James 4:7) and putting on the full armor of God (Eph 6:11). For the more you know your spiritual villain, the more you can help your family abide in the One who came to destroy his schemes (I John 3:8).

## **3. Celebrate the hero**

All kids deserve heroic parents. My dad will always be my hero because he set a godly standard, lived it, and never backed off it. No matter what villainous influences swirled around our family, he clung to G-rated values that made God smile. But more importantly, my dad showed me how to celebrate something greater, someone greater, the ultimate hero – Jesus Christ.

If you want PG kids in an R world, you can't replace Jesus as THE Hero. Heroic? Sure. But don't put yourself on a pedestal because when you fail (we all do), you create a void in your kids' hearts that your spiritual enemy will quickly fill. Great kids are grounded kids – rooted in a deeply personal Hero who never fails and always fills. He fills us with His Spirit to raise kids who celebrate Him too, no matter what the world around them is rated.

## **4. Share surprising twists & happy endings**

Intriguing plots, like intriguing parents, are never boring. They're predictable, yet full of surprises. We want a predictable life, like a Hawaiian weather forecast, but life comes with twists and turns that may cloud our future, but they can inspire our kids to overcome their own challenges. Instead of praying for easy days, pray for edgy days – days that take you to the edge of your limits and show kids the surprising security of living in the palm of God's hand.

Raising PG kids also has another reality – that although our days aren't always happy, we know we'll have a happy ending in heaven. Our days don't determine our destiny. Our eternity in Jesus is secure if we ensure that He is our security. Then, no matter how choppy our seas become, there's healing in our hurricane. Steadfastness in our storminess. And happiness in our holiness.

Next week, we'll unpack how Memorable Characters with memorable character can help you raise PG kids in an R world (and why PG is the goal, not G).

**Questions:** What's your family's dramatic question? How well are you preparing your kids to stand tall in an R world, rather than boiled in pot like a frog?



## **How to Raise PG Kids in an R World – #2: Memorable Characters**

Why in the world is it so hard to find a decent movie? They nearly all have characters following R-rated scripts with strong language, violence, and sex. So too, it's getting harder and harder for your kids to find friends that aren't filled with R-rated vices.

It makes you wonder: How different would our world be if all kids inherited a PG life script from their parents, instead of strong language, violence, and sex?

Granted, kids won't always follow your script, but every parent is a script writer for their kids. And every script needs to develop memorable characters who can overcome and succeed no matter what ups and downs come their way.

What life script are you writing for your kids? Previously, we saw that great kids, like great stories, need intriguing plots with a defining question. This week, we'll show how the life script you're creating at home also needs memorable PG characters with memorable character.

### **4 ways to create Memorable Characters at home**

#### **1. Develop each character's uniqueness**

Your job is to develop your kids – your characters – by unpacking the many layers of their unique personalities and giftedness. You don't require greatness with each layer; you require growth. You're developing characters with the drive to become the driving force of PG life stories.

Don't try to get your kids to all be alike. Don't mold them into an autobiography of you. And don't peel away everything at once. Instead, develop your kids one layer at a time. And help them peel back those layers – layers that God wants pulled away, one by one, to expose the unmistakable aroma of each child's unique character.

#### **2. Cherish each character's value & values**

Each character is a key part of any story. And your child's values determine their story. Like writers, parents create memorable characters with particular motivations. And as kids learn to follow their

God-intended nature and work through their inner motivations, they begin to see their place in this world and their true value in God's eyes.

Cherishing great values is one of the greatest inheritances you can give your kids. If you have memorable values, your kids will likely follow your script. But if you teach PG virtues while living an R life, you'll see John Maxwell's "law of the lid" – your values will be the best you can expect from your kids. So if you don't like your kids values, take a look at your own.

### **3. Guide each character's improvisation**

But what do you do when kids don't follow your script? You improvise. Too many parents try to manage teenagers like newborns. You can get newborns on a schedule, but good luck doing that thirteen years later. Instead of forcing them, guide them. Set standards for what you want, but leave room to improvise so that kids want it too.

You also need to let kids improvise. No, don't let them be in charge or get in a power struggle. Don't allow defiance or delayed obedience. But also don't micromanage their personalities. Allow them to apply your principles, not just comply with your rules. Each child is unique and needs unique ways to make your faith their own, while still living within the shadow of God's wing.

### **4. Make kids the main character of their God's story**

Kids need you to develop, cherish, and guide them, but they also need something else to become memorable characters with memorable character – they need you to make them the main character of their own God story. After all, the role of the main character is to provide insight into the real "hero" – Jesus. And kids can believe it if you help them see it in themselves.

You aren't inflating egos or putting kids on pedestals. You're helping them be like hundreds of biblical characters who found their identity in the One who created them in His Own likeness and for His Own purpose. You're showing them how their life is like a jigsaw puzzle that's missing a piece if they don't fulfill their God-given purpose for the benefit of others.

## **Why PG, not G**

But why, you may ask, should I want PG kids instead of G? The answer is twofold. First, your kids need to be relevant . . . in the world, but not of the world, in order to change the world. Undeniable relevance with unwavering values. And second, you need to be realistic. I'd love to return to yesteryear when G was the norm, but that's not reality. We must help our kids be the salt and light that preserves, flavors, and shines in today's world, not in a world that no longer exists.

In my next blog, I'll unpack the 3<sup>rd</sup> key to raising PG kids in an R world: Clear boundaries. You'll learn how to neither overexpose nor underexpose them to the challenges of today's world. And as a reminder, although this 3-part blog is new, it's based on the principles in my book, *Well Done, Mom & Dad!* If you don't yet have your own copy, please go to <https://timalba.com> or to Amazon at [https://www.amazon.com/s?k=tim+alba&ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=tim+alba&ref=nb_sb_noss_1).

**Questions:** Are you writing a life script with the character you want your kids to emulate? Are you presenting it in ways that your kids will want to follow?



### **How to Raise PG Kids in an R World – #3: Clear boundaries**

Raising PG kids in an R world is like a tropical cruise as a young couple . . . well, you know, without the tropics and without the cruise. But at least you're young, as were we when boarding our first cruise. We had read all about it, but after settling in, we made a common mistake – we rushed outside and got burned. So we spent a week on a ship in needless pain. We knew to apply sunscreen – a boundary we knew to not cross – but we were too excited to stop long enough to apply it.

So too, you can know all about raising kids, but when your toddler learns the power of “no” and your teenager explains why she's smarter than you, you can feel burned, and even peel a bit, wondering what lessons you failed to apply. But don't over-protect kids from all of society's problems – like staying inside on a cruise to avoid sunburn. And don't under-protect kids – like rushing out without sunscreen. The key is creating clear boundaries that properly expose kids to real life.

Over-protecting kids drives them to rebel. Like jaundiced newborns unable to expel excessive bilirubin in their bloodstream, kids with over-protective parents can't expel excessive worldly influences. They need exposure to the Light. The opposite – under-protecting kids – is like leaving them in the sun too long without sunscreen. Without strong SPF-type boundaries, you'll burn their relationships, scar their hearts, and cause them to be susceptible to even worse problems later in life.

Setting clear boundaries is the third of three parts to raising PG kids in an R world. In addition to Intriguing Plots and Memorable Characters, here are four ways to create clear boundaries that give kids the protection that prepares them to be parents of PG kids too one day.

#### **4 ways to create Clear Boundaries at home**

##### **1. Choose age-appropriate boundaries**

John Meador says there are 4 stages of parenting: Caretaker, Cop, Coach, and Consultant. And each stage needs age-appropriate boundaries. We keep newborns within reach, toddlers in sight, and preteens out of life's gutters. Some boundaries must change as kids change. A 9 pm curfew works for 10 year olds but not when they're 25.

Other boundaries, though, are non-negotiable regardless of your kids' ages. For example, morals can't morph and faithfulness can't fade. My dad decided early on to not tolerate inappropriate language on TV, and that hasn't changed. Never let your kids' age determine your response to wrong boundaries. Choose early which boundaries need to adapt and which never will.

## **2. Cast winning boundaries**

Kids need you to not only choose boundaries. They also need you to cast a vision of why they matter. It's like how my dad taught me to cast a rod and reel in order to catch a trophy fish. I learned when to yank them in and when to give them extra line so that the fish could wander a bit before landing it. In strange ways, dad was preparing me for parenting.

Similarly, kids need you to cast a vision that lands the real "trophy" – their hearts and souls. Landing souls, like landing fish, requires you to know when to give kids leeway and when to yank them back. It also requires great hooks and lures. You can't win a child's heart by casting empty hooks and poor lures. By casting boundaries that snag your kids' hearts, you can reel in their souls.

## **3. Stretch, but don't break, boundaries**

Setting stretch-but-don't-break boundaries is a never-ending challenge that stretches you too. It reminds me of my kids' toy, "Stretch Armstrong," whose manufacturer said you could stretch him, but not break him. Turns out, they were wrong. My kids stretched Mr. Armstrong to a point of breaking (and almost did the same to me a few times).

So how do you set boundaries that, unlike Mr. Armstrong, can stretch but not break? The answer is found in Mark 2:22 – don't put new wine into old wineskins. Give kids new "wineskins" – clear boundaries that stretch as needed over time. Don't use old, needlessly-rigid boundaries that worked for you but don't work for your kids. Old boundaries can burst your kids' bubble. Instead, set boundaries that help them trust you so that they'll trust the God you serve.

## **4. Never compromise boundaries**

Compromising that settles disputes can be great, but compromising that accepts low standards is not. To preteens, low standards are a Willie Wonka ticket to empty fun. And to teenagers, low standards are a ticket to mediocrity. But when kids become parents themselves, they look back and see your compromised standards as excuses that over- or under-protected them.

Thankfully, no matter what kids say now, they don't expect perfect boundaries. But they do expect you to choose age-appropriate boundaries, cast a vision that matters, stretch them where appropriate, and hold to boundaries that are in your kids' best interest.

Boundaries act like sunscreen to protect kids from the harmful UV rays of a world that compromises principles for convenience and selfishness. And when you peel emotionally because you got burned (hey, it happens to all of us), please don't get discouraged. It's all part of the healing process . . . whether you're basking on a sunny cruise or baking in the heat of everyday parenting.

**Questions:** How are you protecting your kids without over- or under-protecting them? How well are your boundaries preparing them to stand out as PG kids in an R world?



## **Give Your Kids SPA Treatments**

Oh, the joy of spoiling grandkids. You shower them in ways you never did with your own kids decades earlier. And then you brag about it!

Spoiling, though, doesn't have to be "stuff" you buy for them. It can be a legacy you build for them. Both are treats. Stuff can make them happy for today, but legacies can make them holy for eternity.

I'll never forget the shock of seeing my dad do it too. As a boy, I knew exactly what my dad expected of me. He was unrelenting. Stoic. Strong. Every single day. But when he became a grandpa . . . poof, everything changed. For example, after my child misbehaved, my dad gently said, "You know, Tim, you have to be patient with children." I thought, *WHAT?! Who are you, and what did you do with my dad?*

Looking back, I can see that Dad wasn't just spoiling his grandkids with "stuff." He was also treating them with loving wisdom that comes if you're willing to learn and grow.

In the years since my dad's epiphany of patience, I've been learning my own ways of treating kids and grandkids. Sure, I give them things I never would have bought decades ago, but more importantly I'm giving them something that will change their eternity, something that Jesus also gave His spiritual kids – SPA treatments.

### **3 parts of SPA treatments**

#### **1. Stories**

The "S" of SPA treatments is stories. Kids need stories, not lectures. Personal, purposeful stories connect and engage, especially when shared with transparency and humility. Stories break down walls and build receptivity. They create intrigue by planting seeds that grow roots now and germinate years later. I learned that kids desperately want to know the stories behind your life story – how you became who you are, especially the trials you've overcome.

The ultimate communicator – Jesus – was also the ultimate story teller. His favorite way to connect with His spiritual kids was parables. Like Jesus' parables, your life stories can make memories, stir souls, and prepare future generations. Stories that point kids to eternity aren't pointless tales; they're catalysts to open kids' hearts for the "P" part of SPA treatments – Principles.

## **2. Principles**

Principles are creative ways to share cherished vows with compelling whys. Principled parents drive personal whats by continually doing three things needed for any worthwhile principle to get passed down: 1) they choose it, 2) they live it, and 3) they articulate it.

Principles are your core and your conviction. Your rock and your fortress. They're the foundation of an inspiring life that kids never forget, especially when filled with authenticity and integrity. Principles enliven kids' hearts, enlighten their imaginations, and lighten their load. Yes, you can get stuck on a principle, but that's because you're stuck on your ways instead of on the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of SPA treatments – the “A” of applying it to each person and situation.

## **3. Applications**

The greatest stories and principles mean little without personal applications. Applications draw your kids' interest when you appeal to their interests. Therefore, you must be lifelong students of your kids. For how can kids apply the doctrine of God's Word in their life if they can't connect the dots of God's plan for their life?

Then again, what grandma spoils her grandkids with kale? No, she serves up candy. But the best parents and grandparents serve up a little temporal “candy” and a lot of eternal “kale.” They find ways to connect emotionally so that they can instill spiritually healthy habits. So too, Jesus didn't leave His disciples hanging. By intentionally applying His stories and principles to their lives, Jesus prepared them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Dear parent or grandparent, please don't wait. Start treating your kids with the SPA treatments they need. Your stories, principles, and applications, along with the Bible, will prepare them to treat their own kids one day with the greatest of all gifts – a legacy of loving God and loving others as yourself (Matt 22:37-40).

**Questions:** How did Jesus' parables prepare His spiritual children for eternity? Would your kids say you're the best at stories, principles, or applications? Which one needs the most work?



## **Parenting Like Chess, Not Checkers**

“Alexa, make my child behave.” If only it was that easy. As a young parent, I struggled to lead my kids. Then I realized that my kids weren’t the problem. The problem was raising them without scarring them for life. A friend said her only goal as a mom was to minimize her kids’ counseling when they become adults.

Since kids don’t come with manuals, we hope they aren’t paying attention to our missteps, especially to two pitfalls. Sadly, the story of my son’s potty training illustrates these two pitfalls.

### **2 common parenting pitfalls**

Although his older sister potty trained easily, Josh was another story. I’m not proud of it, but two years earlier, after unsuccessfully explaining the logic of potty training to his sister, I yelled at her. And, because she’s like me – stubborn – she bowed up with an “I’m gonna show HIM!” attitude. And it worked. She never had another potty accident.

Because it worked with his sister, I used the same method with Josh. Just once, mind you, and it worked, right? Nope. Turns out, Josh was different. We tried everything to get Josh out of pull-ups. Anna even offered Josh any toy at Target if he’d potty train. His reply: “No, I’m good.”

Finally, after yet another pull-up disaster, Anna took Josh out back, stripped him down, and hosed him off. And what was Josh’s response to water cascading across his little hiney? He pointed his rear at Anna and proudly proclaimed, “You missed a spot!”

No, not our best moments. Yelling and hosing are not sanctioned by Focus on the Family. But every parent reaches “that” point about something. In the years since, I’m learning how I failed in two pitfalls common to parents: 1) Doing what is natural and 2) Treating each child the same. Both pitfalls feel good, but neither puts kids on the path to faithfulness. Both are parenting like checkers, not chess. Here are four ways you can be the parent you want to be and the parent your kids need you to be – through chess, not checkers.

## **4 ways to parent like chess, not checkers**

### **1. Don't get trapped; think a few moves ahead**

Chess parenting is not simple, easy, or quick. It's not just one move at a time. It's hard, but it helps you win what really matters – the long game. You're preparing your 3-year-old for when she's 33 years old, not just when she's 13. And because you're thinking a few moves ahead, you can be free of feeling like every move will get you trapped.

### **2. Kids are not the same; they have their own purposes & functions**

Kids are not like interchangeable checkers pieces. Some may look and act alike, but raising kids the same is like demanding that my flawed potty training technique must work with Josh too. It's my job to learn his "moves" and how they function to help him fulfill his unique purpose.

### **3. You set the table, but only they can play to win**

Parents prepare kids for the game of life, but only kids can play it. We need to show kids how to play it well and explain the moves we're making. A show-and-tell approach, though, isn't enough. Parents also need to set the table for kids to *want* to win for eternity. Whether we're helping them relate to others, handle change, enjoy the journey, act in faith, or finish strong, we're setting our kids' table to win what truly matters.

### **4. The key is positioning, not "King me!"**

Many parents want the equivalent of "King me!" The goal in checkers is for each piece to get a double "king" portion of dominance. Instead of getting kids to king you, position them to be receptive, learn how to position themselves, and believe God is King (not them or you). Then when you make unpopular or unexpected moves, they'll trust your heart even if they don't understand your tactics.

Like chess, great parenting is hard. But God gives us no greater challenge and no greater privilege than helping our kids one day prepare and position their own kids to believe: they won't get trapped, they have unique purposes, they can win, and God is King.

Then again, maybe it's good that Alexa can't help. Otherwise, what will our kids tell their counselors when they become adults?

**Questions:** How well are you preparing your kids for the long game? How could you better set the table so that they can win for eternity? Are you leading your kids to "king" God, not themselves?

# HERITAGE





## **A Mom's Legacy Triumphs Over Ashes**

Caring for elderly parents. It's both an incredible privilege and a delicate challenge – the transition from receiving their care to being their caregiver. If you've been there, you understand.

Buried in those mixed emotions are priceless nuggets of hope. Recently, one of those nuggets shook my soul and reminded me that I don't need more truth; I need truth to be more real.

### **Discarding mementos but not the memories**

It happened when we moved my parents to independent living and emptied their home. You try to not get caught up in the emotions of discarding 50+ years of household mementos, but it's so hard. Hundreds and hundreds of memory-laden items faced one question: Keep, Toss, or Burn? Sadly, many had to burn. Thus, the billowing black smoke of a raging bonfire clouded the blue sky of my rural Iowa childhood home.

I wanted to keep every treasure in my parents' home, but I couldn't. I needed to downsize my own home, not fill it with more. Therefore, we filled huge dumpsters and stoked that massive bonfire with old furniture, books, knickknacks, and anything burnable. But then I saw something that shook my soul and sifted my spirit – the fiery end of an item that epitomized my beloved mom: her piano.

Like in many families, my mom is the glue. Always loving. Always caring. Always serving. And for decades, she served our community with that piano. Wedding, funerals, and church – all were opportunities to bless others with her musical gift. I knew we had to burn that old rickety piano, but I couldn't turn away. In a surreal stupor, I watched flames engulf this symbol of Mom's selfless legacy and leave little more than a tiny mound of ashes.

Instantly, I remembered part of mom's biblical foundation: "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work" (I Cor. 3:12-13).

## **A common tool resulting in uncommon faithfulness**

In one of the most heart-wrenching moments of my life, I watched that piano face the inevitable fate shared by everything and everyone ever created – fire. Like every possession, that piano eventually burns. But our works are different – some get refined; others burn up. And then it hit me . . .

Mom’s piano burned up, but her legacy never will.

Although Mom’s piano was a great tool for doing good, it was just a tool. Like acts made of “wood, hay, or straw,” it burned. But Mom’s legacy of godly service is different. Like gold, silver, and precious stones, her legacy becomes more pure, more precious, and more permanent when tested.

And sure enough, while helping clean out my old home, Mom’s friends shared memories of her legacy. Without prompting, they gushed about her impact on their lives. Like the prophet Isaiah, she brings good news to the humble and brokenhearted (Is 61:1). And she extends a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and the cloak of praise instead of a disheartened spirit (Is 61:3).

No, my mom has never been famous. Never sought fanfare. All she’s done is live faithfully. Faithful to God. Faithful to family and friends. Faithful to people in need, expecting nothing in return. And for that, countless Iowans, along with God, join me in saying, “Well done, Mom!” You’ve been faithful with little and with much. And one day, hopefully not soon, you’ll enter into the joy of your Master (Matt 25:21).

For indeed, Mom’s legacy will always triumph over ashes because it will never become ashes. It will live on here because it will live on in heaven. It multiplies through people, not possessions.

And so can you. Your legacy can triumph over ashes too if you’ll faithfully fulfill your God-given purpose with God-honoring passion . . . just like my dear ol’ mom.

**Questions:** What is your legacy? When tested by fire, will it burn up, or will it become more pure, more precious, and more permanent? What could you do today to ensure your legacy honors God and lasts for eternity?



## **The Power of Godly Daughters**

I love my sons, but there's just something about daddy's little girl. The first time you hold her and imagine swinging her in a playground and walking her down the wedding aisle. You wonder if she'll be as inspiring as her mother.

Decades later, I no longer have to imagine. I've seen the power of our three godly daughters – one biological daughter and two “bonus” daughters who married our sons.

### **The prayers of godly daughters**

It was August 23, 2019, eight years removed from my corporate career. As Executive Pastor, I was entrusted to help lead huge changes to reach more people for Christ. Other than a new health issue, I should have been flying high. But God was stirring my heart. And it made no sense.

A few days earlier, God woke me with an eerily clear word to resign. But that couldn't be. This wasn't just my job; it was my church. My people. My calling. I loved them and they loved me. No bad story. No “time to move on.” I was unwilling to accept God's prompting and unable to see how God could do it without me. (Wrong, but just being real here.)

To make things worse, it was my birthday. My kids were coming over and I was in no mood to celebrate. So I did something I had never done. I wrestled all day with God on a couch, desperately praying, pondering, begging for an answer . . . a sign . . . anything to make sense of this.

Of all the unexpected ways God could have confirmed the unthinkable, He used some of His very best agents – my daughters. Then again, God often speaks through His daughters.

My kids didn't come over to celebrate. They came to bless. Putting Anna and me in the middle of the den, they surrounded our chairs, laid hands on us, and prayed. Really prayed. I teared up as my sons poured out their hearts. My daughters' prayers, though, changed everything . . .

- Emily had no idea that earlier that day I felt led to study Jehovah Jireh – “God will provide” – where God told Abraham to do an unthinkable act, before providing an unexpected answer. For an hour that morning, I had begged God to reveal why He wanted me to unpack this familiar passage. And what did Emily pray over me that night? Jehovah Jireh.
- Robyn knew neither my weeks of despair nor God’s word to resign, but God prompted her to say, “Tim, don’t doubt in the dark, what God has revealed in the light.”
- Leslie too was unaware that hours earlier I had told God if He really wanted me to resign, I’d do it, but He would have to be my lamp and my light. After all, I’m a planner who never steps out without a plan. And what did Leslie pray over me? Psalm 119:105 – that God would be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Wow! All three unknowingly prayed powerfully to exactly what I had just experienced with God.

## **The power of godly daughters**

Whether it’s through a biological daughter, bonus daughter, or any of His countless godly daughters, God can confirm His will for you too. And He does. Every day. Here are three of the special ways in which God empowers His daughters.

### **1. Grasping**

Godly daughters have a special way of grasping. By intently listening and engaging with God and people, they discern. With a gentle nudge, warm hug, or stern retort, godly daughters care and correct like no one else. When they speak, listen . . . because they can see what you don’t.

### **2. Complementing**

Godly daughters come alongside and complement. They complete without controlling, harmonize without haggling, and balance without bossing. These true servant leaders support and supplement when possible, and solve when required.

### **3. Loving**

Selfless and sacrificial, godly daughters love in ways that few can, and even fewer try. Their special love may look natural, but it’s a supernatural gift empowered by daily choice. They love to love, and we’re the beneficiaries.

P.S. I had no idea at the time, but God had it all worked out. Before I announced my resignation, God had prepared the hearts of my replacement and a godly businessman who wanted me to be his CFO. None of us knew each other’s thoughts, but God did. He causes “all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28, NASB).

And to my Emily, Robyn, and Leslie, I say thank you for letting God use you to change my life and, quite possibly, someone else reading this who needs a little reminder of the power within us all as daughters or sons of our Heavenly Father.

**Questions:** Who has been a powerful godly daughter in your life? How could you express your appreciation to her? What can you do today to grasp, complement, and love someone in need?



## **The Joy of Godly Sons**

Godly sons not only carry on a family name; they also carry on a family legacy. Godly sons are strong and masculine, yet supportive and mindful. They lead out, yet lean in. Undaunted protectors, yet unending praisers. Uncompromising fulfillers, yet unquestioned fuelers. Godly sons are flawed too, but they funnel others to a forgiving Savior.

I've known many godly sons, but when your own sons grow to be godly, it takes on a whole new meaning. A whole new joy. Now that my sons are adults, I know this joy.

### **The joy of godly sons**

When my sons were young, I'd wonder if they'd grow up, or just grow old? Remember any of my good qualities, or just my quirks? Keep pursuing God when off at college, or fall away like so many of their friends? Bring their mother joy, or just pain?

Despite highs and lows, my sons have chosen the former – to grow up, remember the good, pursue God, and bring joy to their mother. My three sons – two biological and one bonus son who married my daughter – have taught me so much about the source of this joy – their godly character.

I've learned that godly character is sautéed, not microwaved. It's crafted with openness, not crammed with opinions. It's caught and taught, not coerced and trampled. It's personal and unique, yet built upon one and only one foundation, the one already laid by Jesus Christ (I Cor 3:11). Here are three of the fruits that grow from the roots of godly sons.

### **3 fruits of godly sons**

### **1. Standing**

Godly sons stand tall by kneeling low. Although unbent by culture and coercion, they bend over backwards to encourage and empathize with those in need. And when they lapse (we all do), their priorities amnesia is only temporary because their integrity is like a fragrant aroma (II Cor 2:15).

For example, as a preteen, my Josh grabbed his little brother and marched home because he would not tolerate a friend's excessive cursing. A decade later, Josh's friends praised his character at his wedding rehearsal dinner. Is Josh perfect? No! The boy who would sit on his little brother's head hasn't changed much in some ways, but his character glows even when his candle burns at both ends.

### **2. Surrendering**

Godly sons surrender lower by aiming higher. They lead their families to put God's will before their own. Self-esteem is high because self-focus is low. By taking a back seat to others, their humble conviction stays upfront.

For example, I initially wondered if my bonus son Ryan's humility was an act to impress me. Then I learned it's an integral part of this man of integrity. Thus, when he sensed God's leading him to move 1,200 miles to help a church plant, Ryan said yes. No job. No family. No network of friends. Just a calling. So Ryan surrendered. And God has blessed his family.

### **3. Serving**

Godly sons serve others' needs more by staring less at their own needs. They go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, and serve when no one is watching. Like their Lord, they're meek (strength through control), not weak. They love people with different color skin because they're comfortable in their own skin.

So too, Caleb serves others, especially his wife, with excellence. Then again, without being asked, teenager Caleb would clean the kitchen before Mom got home. Although service isn't Caleb's spiritual gift, he serves because his character shines at work as much as at home.

I'm not bragging. I'm encouraging you to believe it's possible when you bear the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23), starting with joy. If you will, you'll give your family more than a name, more than strength, more than a role model. You'll give them the legacy of Proverbs 23:24: "The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him."

**Questions:** Who in your life has stood, surrendered, and served with excellence? What kind of legacy would your family say you're passing down? How well does your life bear the fruit of joy?



## **When a Church Truly Becomes Family**

There once was a grand old shepherd who told his young protégé, “When you find a church that helps you raise your kids, stay there.” That shepherd was my father-in-law, Royce, whose advice was not only wise, it was also prophetic.

For 35 years, First Eules/Cross City Church has been there for my family. I never dreamed that after serving as a volunteer for 25 years, God would want me to surrender my financial career to be our executive/admin pastor. Then, even more surprisingly, He called me to surrender my pastoral career and again be a church volunteer and financial executive.

It’s not the path that Anna and I planned. We had planned to move back home near our parents, but we stayed near Eules for one reason . . . the same reason we didn’t leave when church got hard – ugly actually. That reason: because our church truly became family.

### **How a church became family**

Our church is filled with thousands of godly people. But like any family, some are dysfunctional. And what do you do with broken, selfish family members? You love them. Why? Because they’re family. And family sticks together. Through thick and thin. No matter what.

Feelings can get hurt in a biological family too, but you don’t bail. You lean in. You listen, empathize, and preserve the unity. Same with a church family. For whatever reason, God called us to stay. To build. To forgive. To be part of the solution at this amazing home called Cross City Church.

Our church has had such a great cloud of witnesses who served no matter what – people like Billie Jean Moon, Addie Anderson, and Betty Sheppard. They showed us how serving your church lets you pay back the saints who paved the way and pay forward the families that need the same blessing.

I used to wonder why so many church members invested in us. Then I realized it had little to do with us and everything to do with their love for God. To each Senior Pastor, I wasn’t a dumb sheep, I was a dear friend. They poured their hearts into mine. So too, scores of faithful ministers and volunteers helped my kids see church as an outrageously exciting place to grow in God, not an obligatory place to check a box for God.

Like I’m trying to do with my own family, my church created a culture of compelling vision and timeless character. They showed me how to lead myself well so that I can lead my family well. They

taught me to evangelize, disciple, and mentor. Servants like Sharon Smith, Dianna Booher, Elizabeth O'Neal, and Sharon Heizer mirrored Christ's humility and love. And mentors like Gary Phillips, Bryan Lakey, Doug Berg, and Charles Thornton modeled inspiring faithfulness to God's calling.

Here are just seven of the life lessons that my church family has taught me about living like Christ.

## **7 life lessons learned at church**

1. To care deeply – even when it's not appreciated.
2. To serve selflessly – even when it's not reciprocated.
3. To trust wholeheartedly – even when circumstances scream otherwise.
4. To live generously – even when money gets tight and it doesn't make sense.
5. To gaze intently – even when certain people seem worthy of only a glance.
6. To act urgently – even when I'm busy and other people's needs won't go away.
7. To love unconditionally – even for those I love the least.

No, my church isn't perfect. Far from it. But it's family. My family. And as is the case with loving Christ, it's easy to love my church because they first loved me.

Do you have a church family, not just a place to worship? Yes, you may get your feelings hurt or God may call you to serve Him elsewhere. Still, know this: Royce was right. Find a church that helps you raise your kids and stay there. Grow roots. Invest. Through good times and bad, it can become a lifelong partner . . . a spiritual soulmate . . . a church home, not just a church house.

Thus, I join God in saying to the people of Cross City Church, "Well done, church! Now, use your 'talents' to reach more people than ever before."

**Questions:** Do you want a church that meets your preferences or other people's needs? Do you love broken people who need you? What life lessons are you learning at church?



## **How 3 Seconds of Terror Shaped My Kids before They Were Born**

When bad things happen, we ask, *God, why don't You care about me?* While I can't explain such pain, I also can't explain God's favor.

In August 1979, God extended His favor, and I was left to ask, *God, why do You care so much about me?*

A few days before my senior year, I was daydreaming about my girlfriend and upcoming two-a-day football practices. Life was good. Really good . . . until three seconds of terror changed everything.

### **3 seconds of terror**

While stacking hay bales on a conveyor, I felt a tug. A spinning tractor shaft had snagged my jeans leg, twisted it into a knot, and started pulling me in. Instinctively, I pulled back as hard as I could from death or a mangled future. Then it happened. My jeans started ripping. Up my left leg. Across my waist. Down my right leg. I looked down and my jeans were gone. After those three seconds of terror, all that remained were bare legs, undershorts, and a belt holding nothing but tiny jeans fragments.

Dazed and trembling, I collapsed in stunned silence, listening to the dull hum of machinery that chugged along as if nothing happened. It was as if I'd been watching from above, powerless to change my fate. No one was around to turn off the tractor. No one could have heard me if I had screamed. Only God could have ripped away those jeans. After coming to myself, all I could do was sit there and ask, *God, why do You care so much about me?*

### **3 steps that can shape your family**

The miracle of those three seconds shaped my kids born a decade later because it shaped me. I no longer have to understand God to know He cares – in good times and bad. In the four decades that followed, I've found no easy formula. Just three tough steps I can take to shape my family, especially when life doesn't make sense.

### 1. **Trust**

Too often, our trust is limited to what we understand. But we'll never understand much of life, so we must do first what we want to do last – trust that God has a plan for us. Anyone can trust because anyone can choose (Ps. 13:5, 37:5, and 56:3-4, Prov. 3:5-6).

The old hymn says, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” As a child, I dismissed these lyrics as simplistic, but I clung to their truth as an adult when my newborn nearly died, my job dissolved, my mentor disappointed, and my father-in-law’s dementia disabled. Amidst life’s disappointments, we learn to trust that God truly cares.

### 2. **Transcend**

Since trust can feel abstract at times, we need the practical second step of shaping our family – transcend. To transcend is to go beyond the abstract. And where is real transcendence found? In real hope. Hope rises above triumph or tragedy. Hope seeks (not demands) clarity on how to align with God’s plan for us. Hope brings peace when life is anything but peaceful.

Hope isn’t a wish, it’s Christ in us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Hope knows God has called us to the riches of His glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:18). Hope unswervingly professes that God is faithful and a promise keeper (Heb. 10:23, 11:11). Even when weary and faint, hope renews our strength and soars on wings like eagles (Is. 40:31). Hope claims God’s plan to prosper, not harm, us (Jer. 29:11). Hope isn’t a strategy; it’s a choice that transcends because we know God truly cares.

### 3. **Testify**

After tasting a great dish at a restaurant, what do we do? We tell others. We see and smell reminders throughout the day. We find excuses to return, believing today’s experience will be even better than last time. So too with God.

Once we’ve tasted God’s goodness, seen His favor, and felt His care, there’s no going back. We *have* to tell others. Everything reminds us of Him. We do what others need from us – testify. To testify is to serve as evidence of something’s existence. As Christians, we’re evidence that God exists and has a plan for us, no matter what life throws our way (Matt 10:32, I Pet 3:15, Rom 10:9, Acts 1:8). Our lives are like the old children’s song: “Hide it under a bushel? NO! I’m gonna let it shine.”

Trust and obey. Transcend and hope. Testify and shine. If you’ll let this truth shape you, you’ll prepare your family to be shaped too . . . whether they’re facing tragedy or living on a mountain top. Then they’ll believe one thing: God truly cares.

**Questions:** How have you seen God’s care in good times and bad? How could you help your family trust, transcend, and testify that God has a purpose to accomplish through them.



## How Pizza Can Change Your Life Forever

Chocolate and my wife have a special bond. Just a whiff causes endorphins to dance in her brain. My “chocolate,” though, is pizza. Ahhhhh, a Giordano’s deep-dish, a Pappa Rollo’s four-meat special, or an authentic oven-baked Italian pie. Pizza and I have a “thing.”

Each stage of my life had its special pizza. As a kid, it was Mom’s Chef Boyardee pizza. Our college hangout was TJ’s Pizza. Anna and I got engaged at a local pizza joint. When we moved to Texas, though, I heard about the pizza version of Chick-Fil-A – CiCi’s – great food served by outrageously caring people. Like Anna’s chocolate, I didn’t just like CiCi’s. I craved it.

When CiCi’s asked me to join their strategic team, I experienced something far greater than pizza, something I craved even more . . . world-class service. Our people canoed pizzas to flood-swollen neighbors. We cared for a special needs adult so well that his eulogy was about feeling loved at CiCi’s. We jumped counters, engaged enthusiastically, and cared deeply because we existed to wow people.

In those 14 years at CiCi’s, I learned a fundamental truth that forever changed my life. A truth that can change yours too. That truth is this: It’s all about the sauce and how you serve it.

### **1. It’s all about the sauce**

Initially, I thought that CiCi’s served dough with stuff on it. But later I realized that the secret wasn’t the stuff; it was the “sauce.” Not just the tomato-based flavor that covered our dough, our secret sauce was also an undeniable, undaunted culture that covered our team.

Great families, like great pizzas, also have a secret sauce – the character ingredients and recipes that flavor everything in their lives. Your sauce isn’t the entrée, but it accentuates and complements the main things in your life, starting with your family’s character.

In my book *Well Done, Mom & Dad!*, I show fun ways for parents to create a secret sauce of character in their kids. They learn how secret sauces aren’t microwaved; they’re simmered over time by applying just the right amount of heat. And as long as you don’t put too much sauce on your kids’ plates, it can enhance your kids’ lives as well as their eternity.

## **2. And how you serve it**

Great sauces are wasted, though, if not served with excellence and care. That's why CiCi's was in the service business, not the pizza business. Pizza was simply our tool to wow. Then again, wow service always starts at the top and flows down – at work and at home. You can't make kids choose great character, but you can help them crave it by living your chosen qualities with integrity.

What changed my life wasn't the pizza of CiCi's; it was the people of CiCi's. Although we won countless awards and served 100+ million guests annually, our secret sauce was a team that knew its sauce (“exceed every guest's expectations”) and served our raving fans with excellence and care. And although we never called ourselves a “Christian company,” our sauce was flavored by a Christ-centered leadership team that loved to serve, not be served (Matthew 20:28).

Here are just a few of the ways CiCi's people forever changed me:

- Showed me that customers need you to wow their heart.
- Let me fail small so that I could win big.
- Modeled over-the-top generosity.
- Catalyzed my career without compromising my convictions.
- Empowered me to reveal my team members' true value.
- Stripped off layers of pride, exposing my real strengths.
- Prepared me to obey God's call later to be my church's Executive Pastor.

From Joe Croce, I learned unrelenting excellence.

From Kimberly Croce, nudging your spouse's rudder without steering their ship.

From Forbes & Lisa Anderson, mutual respect and deep Christian friendship.

From Bob Kulick, investing in your team.

From Craig Moore, rising to the challenge.

From Mike Shumsky and Bill Spae, never letting good or better rest.

From Larry Minton, prideless teamwork.

Pure optimism, from Joe Flanagan, Jim Sheahan, and Bob Meason.

Creativity at its finest, from Tom Koenigsberg, Nancy Hampton, and Steve Hawter.

Genuine grace, from Sue Tinsley, Lori Bolin, and Jon Foster.

Faithfulness in the details, from Elizabeth Grubach, Cim Lawrence, and Heather Downing.

Giving your best, from Jeff Moran, Jessica Tauaefa, and John Peters.

Functional expertise, from Quinn Newhall, Kyle Smith, and Mark Kiefer.

And living your own secret sauce, from Tommy Marlin, Mike Tolleson, Kelly McCann, Jeff Hetsel, Pat Williamson, and hundreds of franchisees.

Pizza can change your life too by learning the lessons taught by its finest people. If you will, your sauce and how you serve it will become your family's craveable “chocolate.”

**Questions:** What's your family secret sauce, and how do you serve it? Do your kids crave it, even if they don't yet understand it or won't admit it? Are your kids raving fans of your service?

# **FALLACIES & MYTHS**





## 10 Fallacies of Fatherhood – Part 1 of 3

I'll never forget it. My throat choked. My hands shook. Tears streamed. Barely able to catch my breath, I watched the doctor deliver my first child and proclaim, "It's a girl!" As they cut the cord and rubbed her down, I thought: *Wow, we made her! . . . Now what?*

If you're a parent, you've likely had a similar surreal moment when you realized that your helpless newborn is totally dependent on you. Sure, you wonder: Will they be healthy and happy? But you also wonder: Will they join me in heaven?

Although you may not yet be able to answer these questions, you can make it easy for your kids to choose well. In the next 6 blogs, you'll learn ways to help your kids know how to choose well and, more importantly, *want* to.

The first 3 blogs are *The 10 Fallacies of Fatherhood*; the last 3 are *The 10 Myths of Motherhood*. You'll learn 20 errors and 20 corresponding truths to put your kids on the path to faithfulness so that they'll walk it . . . and put faithfulness on a tee so that they'll whack it.

These principles come from our parenting seminars and my book, *Well Done, Mom & Dad!: A Practical Guide to Turn Good Intentions into a Godly Legacy*. Today, we'll start with the first 3 fallacies (and 3 realities) of fatherhood:

### 10 fallacies of fatherhood: #1 - 3

#### Fallacy #1: Be who you are

As a boy, I sang Sammy Davis, Jr.'s famous lyrics: "I can't be right for somebody else if I'm not right for me. I gotta be free. I gotta be free." Being me sounds so good, but it isn't what kids need. Being me is being the "natural" me – the default I was without Jesus. And I no longer want to be that person. Jesus saved me to be the person He intends me to be, not the person I prefer by default.

**Reality #1: Be who your kids need you to be**

As the biblically-appointed spiritual leader of the home, don't abdicate your role to mom who already has so much on her plate. Yes, kids need dads to be strong and unwavering, but they also need dads to listen to their hearts, speak their language, and change to meet their needs. For your kids to want what they need to be faithful, you must be who your kids need you to be.

**Question:** Are you the dad you want to be OR the dad your kids need you to be?

**Fallacy #2: Kids need you to be a super hero**

Kids love superheroes who are smart, strong, and find a way. Superheroes are always there, open imaginations, and inspire kids to dream big. The problem is when superheroes are the only heroes a child has. Thankfully, my dad is my hero. He's smart, strong, and finds a way. By always being there and living his values, my dad opens my imagination and inspires me to become a Christ-follower. Like any great parent, though, his servant-leadership isn't a fantasy; it's reality.

**Reality #2: Kids need you to be a character hero**

More than superheroes, kids need you to be a character hero who instills character in them, speaks character over them, and celebrates the character already within them. Character heroes aren't born. They develop. They learn. They seek and receive counsel. And they, in turn, help others, especially kids, grow to do the same. By molding a culture they can believe in now, they'll want to copy it decades later. You aren't winning popularity contests; you're winning hearts.

**Question:** Are you trying to be your kids' superhero OR their character hero?

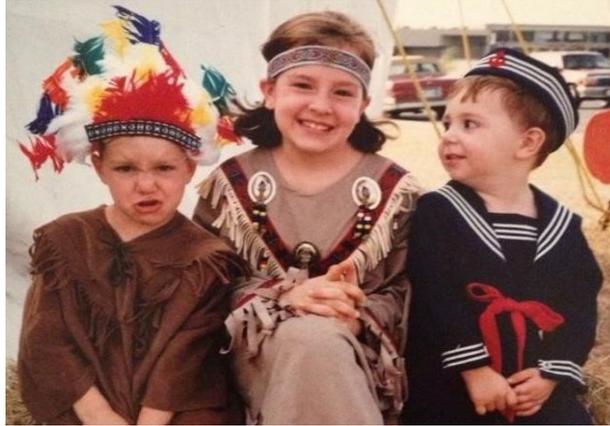
**Fallacy #3: It's the thought that counts**

On my wife's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, I said, "I intended to buy you 24 red roses but it didn't work out." That was the day I learned that Anna didn't care about my intentions. She wanted the roses. So too, kids get tired hearing about what you meant to do. They tune out that you're too tired or got tied up at work. Kids love your efforts, but loath your excuses. They may say they're fine, but as is the case with Momma, "fine" isn't fine.

**Reality #3: Well-intended is not well done**

Godly legacies start with good intentions, but they're defined by kept promises. Kids typically even forgive your lapses, if accompanied by sincere apologies. But you can't talk your way out of consequences you act your way into. Talk without action and a walk that doesn't match your talk – either way, well-intended is not well done. Teaching kids to choose well is one of the greatest gifts a dad can give his kids – a gift that keeps on giving for generations to come.

**Question:** Are you modeling a pattern of well-intended OR well done?



## 10 Fallacies of Fatherhood – Part 2 of 3

Funny how perspectives change. As a kid, my dad didn't know much. But when I graduated college, I saw that I was wrong. And when I became a dad myself, I realized how smart my dad was. He didn't change; I did. My comprehension caught up with my confidence. Ah, the fallacies of childhood.

So too, there are fallacies of fatherhood. You may be absolutely certain of what dads should do, yet be absolutely wrong. Your comprehension needs to catch up with your confidence. Too often, dads treat parenting like driving directions – refusing to ask for help or admit they need it. Many dads don't learn the fallacies of fatherhood, so they don't experience the joys of fatherhood. Here are four more fallacies that can derail your kids' faithfulness and four realities to get them back on track.

### 10 fallacies of fatherhood: #4 - 7

#### **Fallacy #4: Kids don't know your secrets**

Your integrity is like a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece is part of a bigger picture of your character that kids see, even if you don't. They may not know every little secret you're hiding, but they know you. Secrets mold your kids' character, but not how you want. And while kids won't buy a story of deceit that you're selling, they'll likely buy a story of integrity worth selling.

#### **Reality #4: Kids already know your character**

Integrity is also like an impressionist painting. Up close, each dot of integrity looks random. But stepping back, kids can see how those dots together tell your story. You're too close to see it, but they can. They're students of you, even if you aren't a student of them. But kids can also spot true integrity, even if they don't yet admit it. And when they're older, they'll likely emulate your character, as we'll see in the next fallacy/reality.

**Question:** When your kids see, do they see secrets OR true integrity?

#### **Fallacy #5: Friends influence kids more than you do**

Friends have incredible influence. But instead of trying to pick our kids' friends, Anna and I helped them know how to pick good friends and why it mattered. Kids' friends will either reinforce or repel

your influence, but no one – repeat no one – has more influence in your kids’ lives than you. Never let society tell you otherwise. Granted, kids often act like they don’t care, but when the chips are down, they look to you as their compass that points north.

**Reality #5: Kids are like you on steroids**

I thought my sarcastic quips were hilarious until I heard my kids mimic them. I learned that, for good or bad, kids take our habits and attitudes to an extreme. If you ever wonder why your kids act the way they do, start by looking at you. Your injections of integrity will bulk up their character. So too, your compromises and lies will balloon into a legacy of disappointment. Don’t allow your kids’ friends’ influence to usurp yours due to your passivity. Lead your kids choose well.

**Question:** Do you let friends shape your kids OR are you bulking up your kids’ character?

**Fallacy #6: You deserve respect**

Many dads talk down to kids, yet wonder why kids are disrespectful. Please don’t make kids navigate the choppy waters of youth while reconciling your hypocrisy. Might their disrespect be birthed in yours? Yes, the Bible tells kids to obey and respect parents, but how do you respond to a boss or spouse who tells you what to do instead of leading you to do it? Help kids want to respect you. Don’t demand it. Inspire them. Guide and position them. And respect them, no matter how they respond.

**Reality #6: Kids reflect what they expect at home**

A mirror doesn’t lie. It just reflects. You may not see what it shows, but it’s there for anyone to see. So too, your kids’ hearts reflect what they see at home. A home culture of respect is created with daily deposits that draw kids’ interest, not from making “demand deposits” that can be withdrawn at any time. Granted, there’s a time for a come-to-Jesus meeting, but there’s a reason I didn’t rebel much against my dad – he built a home on mutual respect.

**Question:** Do you demand respect OR do your kids reflect a culture of mutual respect?

**Fallacy #7: Never let ‘em see you sweat**

Chances are, you already have a good idea of what dads should be like. Whether it’s what you’ve seen or what you prefer, you’re certain. I was certain that dads should be strong and stoic because that’s how my dad did it. Basically, I learned to “never let ‘em see you sweat.” The problem is that my kids don’t respond well to stoic. As I learned too late, my kids needed a strong dad, but they also needed vulnerability in order to open their hearts.

**Reality #7: Let ‘em know the real you, warts & all**

Turns out, kids want to know your failures even more than your successes. They know you, but they also want to know how you got there – your mistakes and how you overcame them. Molding your kids’ character starts with letting them know your character. I became vulnerable because I love my kids more than I love my privacy. For when you share your warts and all, kids gain confidence that they can overcome their own.

**Question:** Are you guarded OR do your kids really know you, warts and all?



## **10 Fallacies of Fatherhood – Part 3 of 3**

Every daddy of daughters knows the fear . . . some goober boy will steal his daughter’s heart. Never mind that every daddy started out as a goober that his father-in-law feared.

As the saying goes, girls look for a husband who’s much like her daddy. Dad’s example sets her expectations in a mate. I remember when my teenage daughter told Anna, “I’ll never marry someone like Dad!” Sure enough, ten years later, Leslie told Anna, “Ryan is just like Dad.” (It’s true, except he’s a cooler version of me.)

Dads, you need to be the man you want in a son-in-law. If you don’t avoid these last three fallacies of fatherhood (and pursue their three realities), they’ll likely reappear in your kids and grandkids.

### **10 fallacies of fatherhood: #8 - 10**

#### **Fallacy #8: Keep work & home separate**

You may try to be a different man at work than at home, but you can’t. Why? Because integrity is integral in everything. Character follows you like a shadow. I’ll never forget a client who told me a lewd joke and later said he was a church deacon. When he remembered his “joke,” a shadow of shame engulfed him. So too, you can’t live the integrity version of a double agent. You may fool your family for a season, but eventually your sins at work will find you out (Numbers 32:23).

#### **Reality #8: Work & home are interchangeable**

I knew I’d messed up when Anna said, “The kids and I are NOT your employees!” What a wake-up call! I had been a lousy dad and a lousy boss. Home and work are interchangeable. The lessons learned in one apply to the other. Yes, applications differ, but if something won’t fly at home, why would it fly at work? Try talking to your employees the way you talk to your kids (or vice versa) and see what happens. Trust me, it won’t be good.

**Question:** Do you see work & home as separate OR as interchangeable?

**Fallacy #9: Peer pressure ends in school**

Following the crowd never gets you ahead of it. But it's hard to see past the pressure to fit in and feel validated. You graduate from "poopy head" to real crap in junior high. Then you seek identity with high schoolers who promise happiness if you go along. Same as an adult –the Joneses aren't happy either, just older and poorer. Turns out, peer pressure doesn't end in school after all.

**Reality #9: Life just gets more intensive & expensive**

What happens with age? Life just gets more intensive and expensive. Consequences magnify and antes get upped. I'll never forget a couple fighting at a financial Bible study. She was working two jobs to pay for his new golf club. It wasn't about his new club; it was about his trying to keep up with his friends. Acknowledging the bondage of peer pressure is the first step to breaking it and becoming free to truly bond with your family.

**Question:** Are peers still pressuring you OR are you breaking free from its bondage?

**Fallacy #10: Bonding is Mom's job**

There's nothing like a mother's love. Maternal instincts and unending devotion combine to shape an unbreakable bond. But moms are not dads. Moms can't fill the masculine needs of boys and girls. My kids needed Anna's compassion, but Anna couldn't roughhouse play or toss them in the air like me. And she couldn't model manhood. Only I can be Mom's defender and love her like Christ loves His church. Bonding may be easier for moms, but it's dad's job too.

**Reality #10: Bonding with Dad forges godly legacies**

My book *Well Done Mom & Dad!* references Vern Bengtson's research that kids who bond with parents, especially with dad, are more likely to continue a godly legacy than leave it. Both parents are crucial, but a daughter's bond with Dad shapes her future marriage. And a son's bond with Dad shapes his manhood. Never stop pursuing your kids. Win their hearts and you'll likely win their heavenly home. But do it like a real man with both strength and compassion.

**Question:** Do your kids connect mainly with Mom OR are you also forging a bonding legacy?



## **10 Myths of Motherhood – Part 1 of 3**

Rare is the woman who feels fully ready to be a mom. Then you have kids and realize you were right. So many responsibilities. So many roles. You're supposed to be Dr. Mom when your kids are sick, Dr. Phil when they're confused, and Dr. Spock when they're needy.

The real problem, though, isn't your readiness. God gives you what you need when you need it. The problem is false expectations. Some are placed on you by society; many are self-imposed. Rather than living with these myths, though, you can live with God's truth for you . . . truth that not only breaks the chains of these myths, but also sets you free (John 8:31-32).

The next three blogs help moms break free of ten myths of motherhood and live in the freedom of ten related truths. Since freedom starts with understanding bondage, I pray that these myths/truths will help you break free to walk confidently in the Light of life that God intends for moms (Psalm 56:13, Psalm 89:15, John 8:12).

### **10 myths of motherhood: #1 - 3**

#### **Myth #1: Your kids' self-esteem is everything**

Self-esteem is so very important. Every child needs a sense of personal value and self-worth. Positive world views start with positive self-views. But the problem with self-esteem is that the person you're valuing is you. Kids take cues from you, Mom, in learning where to draw their self-worth. If you're all about you, or if you let kids think it's all about them, their esteem will crumble when their feelings, friends, and sometimes you disappoint.

#### **Truth #1: Your kids' Christ-esteem is everything**

There's a better way because there's a better who – Christ. Kids with Christ-esteem have true worth because Christ's character is worthy. Building your kids' Christ-esteem starts with you and who you are in Him. Then kids can know who they are in Christ, not who their feelings, society,

or friends say they are. Christ-esteem is also rooted in truth spoken with grace, a combo that draws kids into a life of constant renewal, not conforming decay (John 1:14, Rom 12:2).

**Question:** Are you building just your kids' self-esteem OR also their Christ-esteem?

**Myth #2: It gets easier as kids get older**

“If I can just get past potty training, then things will get easier.” Buuuuut, then comes training wheels, training bras, and drivers training. Always another crisis. Another distraction. Thankfully, kids learn to wipe their bottom, tie shoes, and buckle seat belts, but they also learn to debate, defend, and dispute. The physical is exchanged with far more important spiritual and emotional needs. Don't pray for your ease; prepare for their eternity. For then you won't just live through it. You'll live above it.

**Truth #2: It gets harder as kids get hardened**

Being a mom doesn't have to be a whoopin', but it gets harder as kids harden. Start when their hearts are like wet cement – moldable and fluid. Yes, kids' questions and problems get tougher, but your daily investments – listening, asking, caring, teaching, encouraging, and disciplining – will form a bonding agent that even the worst influences can't penetrate when kids get set.

**Question:** Are you praying for ease OR preparing kids for eternity by molding their hearts?

**Myth #3: Asking for help is a sign of weakness**

Supermom syndrome. It's a deal. Do it all. Give kids every advantage. You transport them to endless practices and performances, knowing they'll never turn pro. And even if other moms seem to have it all together, they don't. Chances are, those moms also need help, yet lack the courage to ask. Don't act the part. Don't wonder. Focus on what matters. And by all means ask for help. You're not only not being weak when asking; you're blessing someone who wants to help.

**Truth #3: Asking for help is a sign of wisdom**

You don't have to be Supermom to be a super mom. Being super, though, isn't doing everything yourself. Ask for help from your husband, friends, and kids. Then set realistic expectations, clarify, and delegate. Find balance. Don't assume your hubby and others are mind readers or world-class plate spinners. Be a true servant-leader who asks for help – a sign of wisdom.

**Question:** Are you trying to do it all OR do you allow others to be part of the solution?

P.S. Lest anyone think I can somehow understand what it's like to be a mom . . . fear not. Much of this comes from my dear wife, Anna – the master of motherhood.



## 10 Myths of Motherhood – Part 2 of 3

Sometimes we miss the joy. In every age and stage, there's reason to rejoice, even if we have to look hard to find it.

One of my daughter's joys is sunflowers. Just like my Leslie, sunflowers are bold and beautiful. I can't pass a field of sunflowers without thinking of her. But sunflowers also remind me of a time when she was a bit of a challenge . . . a bold beauty needing time to blossom. And now? Oh my, Leslie has blossomed into a beautiful mom who finds joy everywhere, much like her mom.

I hope these next four myths of motherhood help you find joy no matter where you are. For being a mom is sometimes thankless. Often hard. But it's always a God-given privilege . . . a chance to show joy to kids who are looking to you for proof that God's love is real, especially when things are anything but a field of sunflowers.

### 10 myths of motherhood: #4 - 7

#### **Myth #4: If you mess up, you'll mess up your kids**

"If I mess up, who knows what my kids will think about me?" If that's ever you, as gently as I can say this: STOP IT! Your kids' psyche, like their bones, are way more pliable and mendable than yours. Their bad choices don't mean you're a bad mom. They're just imperfect, like you. Don't live with regret; live with resolve. How you overcome mistakes can help your kids stay on the path to faithfulness, because they'll see how to overcome their own mess ups.

#### **Truth #4: If you fess up, you'll bless up your kids**

"I'm sorry. I was wrong. I'll do better. Will you forgive me?" Hmm. Fessing up. What a concept. Don't let your parenting goal be perfection; make it purification – removing contaminants so that your kids can be spiritually clean. You're coming clean so that they can be clean. For by fessing up, you're blessing up your kids. You're modeling how imperfect sinners connect with a perfect Savior who cleanses them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

**Question:** When you mess up, do you kick yourself OR use it to bless your kids?

**Myth #5: Mom always knows best**

Moms wear so many hats – doctor, psychiatrist, nutritionist, educator, and more. Kids assume you know what to do because that’s what you do – care for everybody’s everything. But you can’t know everything. No one can wear every hat. So don’t bear that burden. Instead, ask for wisdom from God, who actually does know best (James 1:5). Cast your cares on Him (Ps 55:22, 1 Pet 5:7). Rest in Him (2 Cor 4:16). And don’t lean on your own understanding (Prov 3:5-6).

**Truth #5: Mom knows best if she leads herself best**

Knowing best requires you to lead yourself best. And leading yourself starts with knowing and applying. Knowledge is key, but knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1). Instead, seek applied knowledge – aka wisdom – which God gives to those who obey Him (Prov 2:6-7). Then again, kids follow those they love and respect. Therefore, the best way to get your kids to follow wisely is to love and respect wisely. And nobody can do that quite like a mom.

**Question:** Do you always know best OR do you always learn & align best?

**Myth #6: You can’t have bad days**

When Momma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy. Still, moms feel the need to always be on because everyone is counting on you. While no child should have to live the rollercoaster of a moody mom, cut yourself some slack. Don’t hold on too tightly to today no matter how good or bad it may be. Instead, remember Ecclesiastes 3:1 – there’s a time and a season for everything, even in the bad days when you need to choose joy because you ain’t happy.

**Truth #6: There’s joy in every age & stage**

Motherhood isn’t always fun. There’s sleep deprivation, projectile vomiting, teenage drama, and more. But do you wait for the good times before having a good time? Please don’t. Rejoice even when you aren’t enjoying today. If you’ll choose joy, you’ll always find it and, more importantly, your kids will find it, regardless of their age and stage.

**Question:** Do you find joy in just the good days OR in every age and stage?

**Myth #7: You need quiet time for a quiet-time**

With all the challenges and demands of being a mom, how do you find time for God? Do you wait for quiet time in order to have a quiet time? Sadly, quiet rarely happens. Suns rise and suns set, but quiet isn’t in your forecast. You can learn tips and tools, but time with God starts with knowing that quietness is more about your spirit than it is about silence.

**Truth #7: Experience God throughout your day**

Listening is a key to experiencing God. Don’t wait for things to slow down before you listen up. Create margin with disciplines like: Sunrise time (set your alarm early), Lights-out time (just God and you; no TV), Shower time (worship music and Scriptures), and Color time (Bible journal while kids color). These disciplines work by listening throughout your day no matter how noisy it gets.

**Question:** Do you need silence to have a quiet time OR do you listen with discipline?



## 10 Myths of Motherhood – Part 3 of 3

You are the greatest influence in your child's life. No one can take Mom's place. No one. The question isn't if you shape your kids . . . it's how are you shaping your kids?

Are you creating in your kids a hunger and thirst for God? Granted, only they can partake of the Lord's intended harvest for them. Only they can study God's Word. Only they can make your faith their own. But are you preparing them to choose well?

Here are the last three myths of motherhood to help you prepare your kids to choose well, especially when you're not there. Are you preparing your kids to be compelling godly adults, not just compliant good kids? For when you see kids as who they can become, not just who they are now, you can help them stay hungry and thirsty for the things of God.

### 10 myths of motherhood: #8 - 10

#### **Myth #8: Let the church teach your kids**

We were blessed with a church that partnered with us in raising godly kids. But we've seen a sad trend – parents expect a church to do a parent's job. After Sunday School, many parents ask their kids, "What Bible verse and song did you learn today?" . . . and they want to be impressed. But in parenting seminars, Anna asks parents: "What if Sunday School teachers asked your kids, 'What Bible verse and song did you learn at home this week?'"

If Anna asked your child, would she be impressed? Church partners are great, but the #1 place for kids to learn about Jesus is at home. And that's your job.

#### **Truth #8: Create teachable moments everywhere**

My kids were blessed that Anna isn't a spiritually passive parent. She's the master of teachable moments. Despite being a dutiful follower, Anna transforms into a proactive teacher of God's love through flowers and rain and fingers and butterflies and food . . . anything they understand. What teachable moments are you creating in everyday life?

**Question:** Do you let a church teach your kids OR do you help kids find God everywhere?

**Myth #9: Give kids plenty of choices**

Getting options is a privilege for kids, not a right. We mistakenly think we're being kind by giving kids open-ended options and teaching them independence. But we're doing the opposite – we're feeding their discontentment. And a discontented heart is a bottomless pit. We need to train kids to be like the Apostle Paul – content, but never satisfied with options that please God.

**Truth #9: Lead kids to choose with fewer options**

When it comes to giving kids options, less is more. Seal off the pit of discontentment by giving them tools for joy. For example, give choices when they're thankful and obedient. Lay out options when they ask respectfully. Either-or choices give comfort and clarity, but open-ended questions easily confuse and overwhelm. Leading kids with fewer, proper options shows them how to rejoice in hope, trials, and the Lord (Rom 12:12, Jam 1:2, Phil 4:4).

**Question:** Are you giving kids too many choices OR fewer options that bring joy?

**Myth #10: Counting to 3 gives kids time to obey**

Another myth is that kids need time and space to come in line and not hurt their feelings. It sounds good, but it doesn't prepare kids for adult living or for eternal life. What boss counts to three? Instead, clarify the benefits of obeying and the consequences of not. Don't say it if you don't mean it, but if you say it, back it up. Then again, God doesn't count to three in the Bible because He says what He means and He means what He says . . . the first time.

**Truth #10: Counting to 3 teaches kids to disobey**

It's simple actually. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Still, there's a reason parents count to three – it works. It coerces kids to act when they hear the "th" of three. But coerced obedience also isn't obedience. Obedience is about alignment, not compliance. If your kids copied your example, would they obey immediately with a graceful heart? Or would they wait begrudgingly until the last possible minute as if God was saying the "th" of three?

**Question:** Are you coercing compliance OR leading your kids to truly obey?

Special thanks to my wife, Anna – the master of motherhood – for helping create these 10 Myths of Motherhood.