

# Parenting Secret Sauce:

How to Flavor Your Family  
With Craveable Character



Tim Alba



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Secret Sauce – Tim & Anna Alba

Authentic *Beliefs* CHOICES

**Devoted**  
Encourager *Family*

**Generous** Humor **Integrity**

*Jesus-follower* KIND  
*Legacy-maker*

Memories **NEVERTHELESS**

**Obedient**  
**Purposeful**  
Quality *Relational*

**Servant-leader** Transforming  
**UNENTITLED**  
*Visionary*

**WELL-DONE!** *Extraordinary*

*Young-hearted* **ZEALOUS**

## Introduction

Every family has a Secret Sauce – the character qualities that meld together to form their family’s unique character. Like any great sauce, these character qualities aren’t intended to be the entrée. Their role is to flavor everything else.

So too, the goal for a parent isn’t to get your kids to mimic your character; it’s for your godly character to flavor everything in them. It’s to enhance their character with dabs of yours, not to put too much “sauce” on their plate . . . and to let it simmer, not apply too much heat.

No two families have the same secret sauce, because no two families have the same combination of character qualities. But can you articulate the character that you want to define your family? If you asked your kids, could they describe the character qualities you’re trying to pass down to them? And if your kids actually did continue on with your qualities, would they lead your kids to embrace Christ’s character?

Too often, families want better, but don’t do better. They may even try harder, but they don’t know quite where to start. The place to start is by first choosing to flavor your family with craveable character. Then you are on the path to creating a secret sauce of character that flavors your kids for a lifetime and beyond. Ironically, I started grasping this lesson at, of all places, CiCi’s Pizza.

Before joining the CiCi’s family, I didn’t know how they made their sauce. I just knew that I craved it. Even better than their sauce, though, was their service. How did they become the Chick-fil-A of pizza with such over-the-top friendly employees?

I watched CiCi’s team members get genuinely excited to greet and serve guests. I saw their manager jump a counter to help a mom with her little kids. They ran next door to a 7-11 to buy apple juice because my friend’s little girl wanted apple juice but CiCi’s carried only soda. Their incredible service was clearly a secret to CiCi’s success. It made me want to join such an inspiring culture. And my conclusion after serving nearly fourteen years at this industry leader was one basic truth – a truth that applies at both work and home:

### **It’s all about the sauce and how you serve it.**

What’s your family’s secret sauce? The question isn’t if you’re putting a sauce of character on your kids’ plates; it’s if it’s the sauce you want for them. And question also is about how you’re serving up the character that you want your kids to carry on.

For no matter how great your own character may be, what does it benefit your kids if they don’t make it their own, albeit in their own unique ways. Good intentions aren’t enough. You need a plan and simple steps to get started. That is the purpose of this Parenting Secret Sauce booklet – to get you

started on the journey to flavoring your family with craveable character – your own secret sauce – and to help you lead your kids to *want to* one day do the same for their own family.

What follows are my family’s 26 A-to-Z character qualities (starting with Authentic and ending with Zealous), and how each one is a vow of what my kids can expect from their mom and me. I’ll give you practical examples of how you too can articulate a godly legacy to pass down to your kids, by choosing, sharing, and living out your own unique Secret Sauce of family character.

You’ll select one character quality for each of the 26 alphabet letters. For example, “A” character qualities at the end of the “A” chapter include: Abide, Achieve, Affirm, Admirable, Adventure, Agreeable, Aligned, Ambitious, Amiable, Appreciative, Artistic, Ascend, Attentive, Authentic, Awaken, or \_\_\_\_\_ (pick your own).

On pages 55 -56 are over 350 examples of A-to-Z character qualities to choose from, followed by a sheet for you to summarize your 26 character qualities. There are also next steps for you to take, as shown on page 57. All of this, though, starts with a choice – a choice that only you can make – to live out a character version of Joshua 24:15: Choose for yourselves today your character qualities, but as for me and my house, we will emulate the Lord.

Remember, you can’t convince or force kids to be faithful. But you can do your part to help them want to. May God bless you indeed as you take a step toward being the parent-leader that your kids need so that, one day, they too will want what they need to be faithful, and hear “Well done!” from both God and family.



## A – AUTHENTIC

The door to your kids' faithfulness hinges on the authenticity of your character.

—

We'll begin with why Anna and I chose our "A" character quality: Authentic – the reality of character.

### **Authentic: The reality of character**

If I made a short list of desired family traits, it would have to include authenticity. My family isn't what we could be or should be, but no one has to wonder what to expect from us. For good and bad, we're who we appear to be. Perfect? Not even close. But we strive to be real.

Being authentic isn't "you be you." God created you to be who He wants you to be. Not who you prefer to be. Not who people tell you to be. Not copying someone else. Our job as parents is to help kids become the best version of who God yearns for them to be. And while my kids share my passion for authenticity, here are examples of how it's uniquely modeled in each of them.

### **The uniqueness of authenticity**

No one lives her chosen character more than Leslie. She too is a work in progress, but Leslie strives fearlessly to be the woman she needs to be for God and others. And her humble beau, Ryan, isn't seeking approval because he's already approved in Christ. With their identity set, unwavering authenticity is their heart, not just a habit. Fully present. Not pretentious or presumptive.

And I love how Josh is so comfortable in his own skin. Yes, his sweet Robyn has to say, "Josh, use your inside voice" because he's loud and proud. But Josh is genuinely clear and consistent in his choices. And Robyn, like all my "bonus" in-law kids, complements her spouse's weaknesses with her own strengths and unrelenting authenticity.

Then there's Caleb. Good luck telling Caleb to be something he isn't. Behind his sarcastic, funny jabs is a man who cares deeply, shares vulnerably, and sees courageously. Authenticity isn't an excuse for doing what he prefers. And in Emily, he found a light whose enduring character is pure and principled . . . an answer to parents' prayers for their kids' spouses.

Last, there's the glue of our family – my bride. Anna is genuine, honest, and agenda-less. She's the epitome of WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) – the same character in private as in public. Anna is content, yet desperate to be more. Predictable, not mundane. Gracious, yet uncompromising. Beautifully bona fide beyond her outward beauty.

### **A worthy cornerstone**

Is this bragging? Nope. I'm simply affirming why authenticity is a worthy cornerstone upon which to build a family. It becomes real when reliability meets routine. And it grows captivating when clarity meets consistency. We have a long way to go, all four couples of our family picked Authentic as their "A" Secret Sauce character quality that they want to describe their family.

Being authentic in Christ comes from emulating His character. The more we emulate His character, the more we grasp His grace. And the more we grasp His grace, the more we're compelled to live for His glory. That's the proven, genuine, transparent, undisputable, irrefutable, ridiculously-addictive reality of character that opens the door of your kids' hearts.

### **What's your "A" character quality?**

Authentic is my "A" character quality, but what's yours? Start by picking your "A" character quality from the list at pages 55-56: Abide, Achieve, Affirm, Admirable, Adventure, Agreeable, Aligned, Ambitious, Amiable, Appreciative, Artistic, Ascend, Attentive, Authentic, Awaken, or \_\_\_\_\_.

Questions: How would your kids describe the reality of your character? Which "A" word best describes the character that you want for your family, and why?



## **B – BELIEFS**

The believability of your beliefs is the bedrock of your family’s future.

Beliefs built on sand will crash. Bedrock beliefs, though, don’t break; they stand tall and see beyond, even if you feel abandoned and all alone. You can stand on those beliefs because they’re built on the Rock (Matt. 7:24-27). That’s what I saw seven months after my daughter, Leslie, chose her own Secret Sauce of 26 A-to-Z character qualities: Authentic and Bold, all the way to Yoked and Zealous.

For it was seven months later that Leslie gave birth to our first grandchild, Cade Bolder Medlin. And then it hit me. Her “B” character quality was Bold! I still get chills thinking how our little Cade the Bold, as we call him, is living proof of how your family’s character can come alive when it becomes their bedrock foundation. And no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1Cor. 3:11) – the one foundation that doesn’t crack or break.

The “B” of your Secret Sauce of character qualities might be one of those listed on page 55, but mine had to be Beliefs – the foundation of character I’ll die for and what I live for.

### **Beliefs: The foundation of character**

In addition to authenticity (the reality of character), families need to build a home with a bedrock of beliefs. Beliefs aren’t just your values; they’re why you value them. They’re your unmovable principles. Your convictions. Your paradigm.

God-honoring Beliefs enable everything else needed for a godly legacy. They produce faith, which produces hope, which produces a bold confidence in God’s sovereignty and a certainty of what we can’t see (Heb. 11:1). More importantly, these Beliefs enable us to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Regular ol’ beliefs ebb and flow like the tides, but God-honoring Beliefs are an unending waterfall of God’s promises. They aren’t just a collection of standards; they’re a standard you won’t compromise and a funnel to filter out life’s impurities. They can’t be bought, sold, or inherited, but they’re freely received and freely passed along.

Our family doesn't claim to have all the right beliefs, but we strive to consistently live the critical few beliefs that truly matter. And we trust that as we seek God's knowledge and wisdom, His Spirit acts like guardrails to keep us out of spiritual ditches.

What shed a whole new light on beliefs for me was becoming a parent. Now I can see how kids must wrestle with my godly beliefs in order to readily embrace their own. Day by intentional day, memory by intentional memory, they need to see how beliefs are owned, not borrowed . . . held high before they can be passed down . . . lived within you, so that they can be lived out for others.

### **Building on a foundation of family beliefs**

Three of the greatest days with each of my kids are when they did three things: 1) accepted Jesus as their Savior, 2) got baptized, and 3) told me about when my faith became deeply theirs. They drew from a faith heritage started generations earlier, but they all had to choose whether or not they'd build on that heritage . . . if their faith was based on principles or popularity.

Principles aren't always popular, but they forge legacies. Without principles, beliefs slip into preferences. And preferences don't compel. At best, preferences comply. And compliance alone leads to lethargy, not legacies. Instead of being a Just-do-what-I-say parent, become a Just-follow-me parent whose beliefs and actions align and engage your kids with God's word.

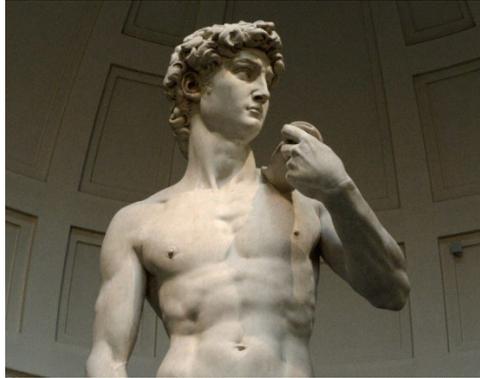
What beliefs are building your foundation? Are they believable? Do they extend, or do they extinguish, your desired legacy? Do they enliven, or do they endanger, your kids' passions? James 2:17 tells us that faith without works is dead. Is your real faith based on real beliefs, and is there real evidence?

Unlike our little Cade the Bold, your kids' B character qualities may not call you Grandpa. But are they fueling and securing principles upon which to build godly homes?

### **What's your "B" character quality?**

Have you started creating your own Secret Sauce of A-to-Z family character? Here are possibilities for "B" from pages 55-56: Beacon, Believable, Belong, Beloved, Best-practices, Biblical, Big-hearted, Blessing, Bold, Bonding, Boundless, Brave, Bright, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** What believable beliefs shape the foundation of your character? What "B" word best describes the character you want for your family, and why?



## C – CHOICES

Adversity and comfort are the great chisellers of character.

Your choices amidst life's greatest challenges say everything about you. Tough times, though, don't have to lop off chunks of your soul. They can reveal all kinds of possibilities. Like Michelangelo, you can see the angel in the marble of your adversity and chisel away until you set it free.

The two Exodus spies, Joshua and Caleb, chiseled a new nation because God had already chiseled their character. They made a choice to choose. They feared God, not their giant enemies, which is why I named my sons Joshua and Caleb – to help pass down a legacy of choosing to choose.

Comfort also reveals a key truth. While tough times can drive us to God, good times can slowly, unknowingly pull us away. Joshua's challenges didn't stop after he conquered the Promised Land. They intensified, because his nation's choices waned as their adversity waned. Then again, comfort is always our enemy unless we use it to chisel away our sin. Adversity or comfort – either way, we must never forget to choose. That became humorously obvious as we drove home from church.

My pre-teen sons were squabbling, as usual, in the back of the van until their teenage sister and I began debating. I looked in the rear view mirror and said, "Hey, Leslie, what did you think about Pastor's sermon today? Pretty cool, huh? All about choosing!"

In her usual denial of my undoubtedly stellar counsel, Leslie wryly retorted, "No, it wasn't."

"Sure it was," I replied.

"No it wasn't, Dad!"

"Well, Les, what do you think it was about?"

"It was about choices!"

The rest of us, of course, burst in laughter. Leslie had missed the point. But, sadly, so do I when I don't realize the need to choose and the profound impact choices have upon family. Godly legacies

are birthed in Authenticity and Beliefs, but they need another character quality to reach maturity, the “C” of my family’s A-to-Z secret sauce of character: Choices – the proof of character.

### **Choices: The proof of character**

I can’t know your intent, but I can know your character because I can see your choices. I can influence, instruct, and inspire you. I can model and minister unto you. But I can’t choose for you. Only you can choose. Therefore, I need to remember my role as a parent. It’s not to make my kids’ choices; it’s to make it easy for them to choose well.

While Anna and I messed up many things as parents, we made sure our kids did one thing – they had to choose. I’ll take deliberate, bad choices over the abyss of default choices. Deliberate choices allow you to reflect and redirect to a better path, no matter how dark today’s path may be.

One of my heroes is Dr. Viktor Frankl, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, who said that when stripped to your bare nakedness, you still have the ability to choose. He chose his response when other prisoners surrendered theirs. Despite losing everything, he refused to be a victim. Instead, Frankl is proof that you can always choose to choose.

Frankl’s example inspired one my favorite parenting memories – creating our family’s *Declaration of Him-dependence* – a family covenant to God. Two decades later, it’s still prominently displayed in our home, along with photos of us signing it in 1776-looking white wigs, black robes, and feather pens. These goofy photos forged bonding memories of a family that chooses to choose.

Were all of our choices great? Of course not. We learned through failures caused by bad choices too. Some of those failures were ours and others were caused by other people’s poor choices. Either way, though, we refuse to be victims. We choose to learn. We choose to choose. And we choose to un-choose, because if you truly want something better, you must un-choose what got you here.

Three of the greatest gifts we can give our kids is to expect them to choose, empower them to choose, and equip them to choose. And then hold them accountable. Every choice won’t be perfect, but if we prepare our kids to choose, we can create a chain of choices that creates a pattern of proof that creates generations of faithful character. If you will, you’re preparing your kids to pass down a legacy of proven character, chiseled by both adversity and comfort.

### **What’s your “C” character quality?**

Select your “C” character quality from the list on pages 55-56, or create your own: Captivate, Care, Challenge, Cheerful, Christ-like, Commit, Communicate, Compelling, Confident, Consistent, Contented, Courageous, Courteous, Curious, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** What proof would your kids say exists of your God-honoring choices? What “C” word represents the character you want for your family, and why?



## **D – DEVOTED**

Devotion forgives the bad that shouldn't be in you, celebrates the good that's already in you, and believes the possibilities that could arise from within you.

When love morphs into devotion, it looks like 1 Corinthians 13.

### **1 Corinthians 13 devotion**

If I succeed with the talents of men and angels, but don't have devotion, I'm a resounding failure. If I have the gift of serving and can fix all problems and mend all relationships, and if I have all faith that can move mountains, but lack devotion, I'm nothing. If I give all my time and money to the poor and sacrifice for others, but don't have devotion, I gain nothing.

Devotion is faithful and hopeful, it's graceful and truthful. It doesn't blame, excuse, neglect, or presume. It listens and connects, covers and overcomes, and loves before it feels loved. Devotion doesn't get inactive or reactive because it's always active and proactive.

Devotion never fails. It stands strong, kneels below, bows before, and serves alongside. It leads out because it serves under. Devotion sees past today's challenges because it sees tomorrow's champions. It's ever learning, ever adapting, ever expanding. When I was a child, I loved like a child. But when I became an adult, my child-like love morphed into Christ-like devotion. For of all the virtues that please God, the greatest is reflecting His devotion.

There are many great "D" character qualities listed on page 55, but I chose Devotion because it goes far deeper than a feeling of love. Devotion is the depth of character

### **Devotion: The depth of character**

Devotion is a conviction that acts. It's a gift returned to God (1 John 4:19) and why we give it (John 3:16). It's how we live (1 Cor. 16:14), for Whom we live, and in Whom we live (1 John 4:16). It advances even when life retreats. It stands when relationships fall. Devotion is rooted in God's character and built from your own character in order to mold someone else's character. It affirms

when you're alone, enlivens when you're empty, and sustains when you're stuck. It's the loyal, once-and-for-all, I-choose-you kind of abiding love.

Devotion is keen, enthusiastic, dedicated, and fervent. It's fanatical, dutiful, staunch, and ever constant. It's committed, affectionate, attentive, and supportive. Devotion is also unqualified, unrelenting, and unbroken. This kind of engaging, transcendent devotion comes only from God and flows from His filling.

Devotion, though, doesn't come without conflict. Instead, it's honed by conflict. It shines when iron sharpens iron (Prov. 27:17). It neither demands nor capitulates to demands. It's a predisposition based a predetermination that draws people together in unity (Col. 3:14)

No family always reflects this depth of devotion, but we can try with a balance of grace and truth. We can be compassionate and cordial, forgiving and friendly, welcoming and warm, regardless of how others respond. Our care simply can't depend upon someone else's response. We can give it, no matter how they receive it. And when we do, our kids learn to see people's faith, not their faults.

For the more we understand God's devotion to us, the more we can't help but be devoted to Him. And the more devoted we are to God, the more we are devoted to one another. That devotion is patient, kind, and rejoices in truth. It isn't jealous, bragging, or arrogant. And in all things it bears, believes, hopes, and endures (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

With that depth of devotion, kids are ready to receive and, in turn, pass down the greatest of all gifts – being complete in Christ and devoted to one another in His love (Rom. 12:10). For three things will last forever: faith, hope, and devotion, but the greatest is devotion (1 Cor. 13:13).

### **What's your "D" character quality?**

Which of these "D" qualities do you want most to define your family: Daring, Decisive, Dedicated, Dependable, Deploying, Determined, Devoted, Dignified, Diligent, Direct, Discerning, Discreet, Disciplined, Dreamer, Driven, or \_\_\_\_\_?

**Questions:** How would God describe the depth of your devotion to Him? What "D" word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?



## E – ENCOURAGER

All kids need a character hero to instill character in them, speak character over them, and celebrate the character already within them.

Kids need heroes to help them press on, lift their spirit, and believe they can. And so do adults. As kids, we have great imagination and believe in superheroes. But as adults, we often need help imagining ourselves as a hero for others.

Sure, we need correction, but more often we need encouragement. As a recovering perfectionist, I'm learning to celebrate the good already in people, not just point out what they could do better. Why? Because more than educator heroes, we need encourager heroes – people with a repeated, predictable pattern of encouragement. We need serial encouragers like Joseph.

Joseph recruited Saul, a man in serious need of encouragement. Joseph, though, was better known by his nickname, Barnabas – Son of Encouragement. Imagine being such a serial encourager that people forget your name and call you “Son of Encouragement.” And because Barnabas changed Saul's world, Saul became the Apostle Paul, who became a world-changer.

When picking their 26 A-to-Z Secret Sauce of character qualities, my kids chose Empowering and Endurance. Great qualities. But I picked Encourager because I want to encourage them daily (Heb. 3:13), spur them on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24), and lead them to peace and edification (Rom. 14:19). Why? Because everyone needs encouragement – the celebration of character.

### **Encourager: The celebration of character**

Who stirs and spurs your soul? Who infuses your passions? Who emboldens you to overcome fear? It's not a consultant with a framework for life or a celebrity with tips on living life. It's the encourager who fills your heart with hope.

Some people have the spiritual gift of encouragement. But even if it's not a gift you've received, it's a gift you can give. It's a choice. Instead of fixating on your spiritual gifts, encourage people to fulfill theirs. Encouragement isn't my spiritual gift either, but I hope that people think it is.

Like the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11, we're also surrounded by a great cloud of encouragers. These serial encouragers can be both tender and tough, as well as reproving and reinforcing. They affirm, validate, and inspire. They help us focus on what truly matters without insisting on what it must be. That's who Nathan Jones was for me.

A shameless encourager one moment and a bold challenger the next, Nathan saw something in me and he was determined to stir it up. One day as I shared my heart, Nathan slowly tilted back his chair, nodded in subtle approval, and bellowed, "The student has become the teacher." I'll never forget his joy in seeing how his mentoring had meshed into a unique character all my own.

Encouraging and challenging are two sides of a character-building coin that build trust, raise confidence, and lower barriers. They together earn the right to peek behind people's veil without invading their space. They help us become resolute by repairing, fortifying, and infusing courage.

This happens as we seek the good already in people and celebrate it. Brick by brick. Word by word. Deed by deed. The New Testament word for encourage is an architectural term for building up, edifying, and promoting someone's growth. Encouragers don't plug holes in a leaky dike of character; they build dams of character that slowly irrigate without flooding people with too much at one time.

Encouragers help us see what we need, without telling us how to feel. They don't put down or speak over. They build us up by stirring up the character within us all. They bear up, buck up, and cheer up. And they point us up to the Savior who God raised up from the dead so that we too can be raised up with Him in glory.

Let's rise up. Let's stir up. Let's live up to our God-given potential. And let's encourage our family to do the same. That's being an encouraging character hero now that God will celebrate in heaven.

### **What's your "E" character quality?**

Pick your "E" character quality or add your own: Eager, Earnest, Educated, Effective, Elevate, Embolden, Empathy, Empowering, Encourage, Endurance, Engage, Enhance, Enliven, Enthusiastic, Ethics, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** Do you tend to correct what's not yet in your kids, or celebrate the character already there? What "E" quality do you want for your family, and why?



## **F – FAMILY**

No achievement, not the grandest victory nor the sweetest success, can ever compare with the simple, sweet embrace of a family that acts like family.

Families come and go, but jobs are forever. Wait, what?!

That sad statement hits home when we consider how some families often act like it's true. Or maybe your struggle is with loving something else . . . Money? Control? Beauty? Happiness? If only we'd live what we already know – that faith and family are everything. Faith and family are like conjoined twins – two separate ideas entwined into one ideal that God loves so much, He gave His Son to redeem them both.

If you want to win the war, win the family. If you want to win the family, win their hearts. To win their hearts, win their trust. And to win their trust, know your job. Your job isn't being your kids' source of power; it's being an extension cord that plugs them into God, the true source of power. Then again, that's why Satan vigorously attacks the family . . . it's the extension of character.

### **Family: The extension of character**

Other than God Himself, nothing matters more to me than family. Family is the backbone that stabilizes society. It comes through a mom and dad, but family is more than a pedigree and an ancestry. It's can include two kids and an SUV, but it's far more than Christmas photos in matching buffalo plaid shirts. It's how we populate our earth, but it's also the primary way we promulgate our faith. How our kids plug into us is likely how they'll likely plug into God. But when your family plugs into you, what are they extending?

I could be a foreign missionary, but is my family my greatest mission field?

I could be a venture capitalist, but is my family's character my most prized venture?

I could have the wisdom of Solomon, but does my family share my wisdom?

Although Solomon wrote the wisest parenting manual in history (Proverbs), he missed the mark as a parent, much like his dad, David. And David became king because of Saul's sins. Saul became king due to Samuel's rebellious sons. And Samuel followed Eli because Eli wouldn't rebuke his sinful sons. Unless your family is your #1 ministry, your legacy can be one generation away from extinction.

As morbid as it sounds, writing the book *Well Done, Mom & Dad!* was the one thing I had to do before I die. Why? Because I had to help my kids know how to be faithful and, more importantly, *want* to. Every day, your character extends to your kids, but is it the character you want for them?

For their "F" Secret Sauce character quality, my kids chose Fearless, Focus, and Forgiving. All great choices. But I struggled choosing between faith and family. Since I wanted a clearer word for Faith, I used Jesus-follower for "J," allowing "F" to be Family. Thus, both faith and family can be part of our 26 A-to-Z qualities – two entwined parts of one offering unto God.

Don't be like the unfaithful people in Malachi 1 who offered weak, blind, and lame sacrifices to God, and then wondered why God was mad and their family's character was flawed. For kids to carry on a faithful legacy, kids need parents to build them up and give them back to God as an unblemished offering (as it depends on you), a sacrificial offering (that costs you everything), and a lavish offering (because God deserves your best).

When we exhibit God's example for us, we become an extension of Him. Being part of God's family is how He lavishes us with love (1 John 3:12), welcomes us into His household (Eph. 2:19), and adopts us as His own (Eph. 1:5). Kids need a family that points them to the God whose overflowing character extends long after they're gone . . . a family whose hearts bear a remarkable resemblance to their Heavenly Father.

If we will, our kids never again need to be fearful. Never again feel alone. They can live with the assurance of being adopted into God's family and extensions of His grace. Why? Because God doesn't come and go. He's forever . . . even if we don't look perfect with matching buffalo plaid.

### **What's your "F" character quality?**

Here are examples of "F" character qualities to choose from in choosing your family's 26 A-to-Z Secret Sauce: Facilitate, Fair, Faithful, Family, Fearless, Fellowship, Fervent, Fidelity, Flexible, Flourish, Focus, Forgiving, Friend, Fulfill, Fun, Funny, Futuristic or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How is your family an extension of your relationship to God? What "F" word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?



## G – GENEROUS

Flaming liberal –a term never used to describe me, except hopefully in one area: generosity.

If you ask my kids who’s the most giving, humble man they know, they’ll say, “Grandpa Alba” (my dad). As a kid, I wondered why my dad gave away so much to others. But now I get it. He gave because his heart overflowed with outrageous generosity. My dad and I are both conservative in doctrine, but I want to like him in another way – as a flaming liberal in giving.

The key to liberal giving isn’t your checking account; it’s your caring account. We can give from an overflowing caring account if we’ll first give ourselves to God. “Their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability .... And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us” (2 Cor. 8:2-5).

Abundance is a waterfall flowing from people who gush with generosity. Like my wife, Dad simply models 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Cheerful givers are predisposed to act with my family’s “G” character quality: Generous – the overflow of character.

### **Generous: The overflow of character**

I’ve joked with my kids that humble generosity skips a generation, so they have a chance. Actually, I tried to show them how generosity is a heart as well as a habit. It grows from planting and harvesting, not pursuing and hoarding. For when you give as unto God, your glass is never half-empty or half-full; it’s a full blessing for whoever needs it poured into their lives.

When hearts overflow, so does giving. For example, I remember as a kid riding with Dad to secretly give cash to a man in need. The cash didn’t solve that man’s problems, but it’s what Dad had. So he gave it, expecting nothing in return. Over and over, I saw how time, energy, and money follow your heart. And Dad’s heart gave without hesitation.

Generosity is contagious. It attracts and connects. While kids love getting gifts, they grow to admire the character that gives to meet needs. Generosity includes money, but it goes so much deeper to meet emotional, spiritual, and relational needs. Like saving faith, God's overflowing generosity is a free gift. Granted, not gained. Experienced, not earned.

Generosity also reflects the size of your world. When you live in a small world, you complain about small problems. But when you live in a big world, you see big possibilities. You dream big. You give and live generously. You overflow.

Overflowing generosity originates from God, who gives to all generously and without reproach (James 1:5). Our cup overflows because God prepares a table for us and anoints our head with oil (Psalm 23:5). Jesus came to give overflowing life (John 10:10). And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may overflow in hope (Romans 15:13).

Generous kids are birthed from generous parents who increase and overflow in love (1 Thessalonians 3:12). They speak from overflowing hearts (Luke 6:45). And they honor God from overflowing first fruits (Proverbs 3:9). I want to lead my kids to be openhanded, unselfish, and unsparing. Like their grandparents, may they be lavish in love, sympathetic in speech, profuse in praise, compassionate in charity, altruistic in aim, and abundant in actions.

Thankfully, God's generosity doesn't skip a generation. It never runs out. It overflows like an endless waterfall of God's grace. You may be naturally generous, or you may be a natural hoarder like me, but we can all be bridges of God's grace because we're all beneficiaries of His generosity (John 3:16). Indeed, we're never more like our Eternal Father than when we lovingly and cheerfully model His flamingly-liberal generosity.

### **What's your "G" character quality?**

Which of these "G" character qualities do you want to describe your family? Generous, Gentle, Giver, Glowing, Goal-oriented, Godly, Good-natured, Graceful, Gracious, Grateful, Guilt-free, or something else? My kids picked Grace, Gracious, Grateful, or \_\_\_\_\_. Your 26 A-to-Z character qualities don't have to be who you already are . . . just who you're committed to become.

**Questions:** How could you live with overflowing generosity, and how would it impact your kids? What "G" word expresses the character you want for your family, and why?



## **H – HUMOR**

Laughter isn't the opposite of anger; it's the opposite of hopeless and joyless.

There's nothing like an infant's laugh. Their little giggles melt your heart and make you wonder what they'll be like when they're grown. Hearty laughter helps your body by relieving stress, triggering endorphins, and easing pain. But humor also helps your soul. It breaks barriers, softens disputes, and strengthens bonds. And, more importantly, levity brings hope and joy.

Great humor makes great memories. But not all my humor is well received, like when I said, "Hey, kids, did you know Mom's on a diet?" Yes, I should have stopped right there, but for some stupid reason I continued: "Yeah, she's only eating with one hand." Dead silence. Even my young sons knew I really messed up. But, good news, I never made that mistake again. Nope. Just once.

Still, despite my occasional lapses of judgment, humor shaped many an awesome family memory. It was one of the few things that bonded me with my teenage daughter. It helped us overcome heartache, disarm disputes, and transcend troubles. It enlivened the dull spots and soothed the rough spots. Not mean-spirited. No cheap laughs. Never profanity-laden. Just good-natured jabs, silly satire, and ironic observations to lighten the mood, lighten the load, and lighten the heart.

The only chance I had to get a girl like Anna was humor. It wouldn't happen due to my good looks, ripped muscles, or winsome personality. After decades of marriage, I asked Anna how we ended up together, despite all our differences. She just smiled and said, "Because you make me laugh." Then again, humor is the only chance for many of us who marry way above our head.

Humor is just one of many great "H" character qualities. I initially wanted either Humble or Heroic as my H quality, but I decided instead to use Unentitled for "U" and Legacy-maker for "L." And you'll see later why N-Nevertheless is a more powerful version of another great H quality: Holy. No, Anna and I needed our H character quality to be Humor – the light-heartedness of character.

## **Humor: The light-heartedness of character**

Humor can exist in virtually any situation. Yes, there are times to mourn, but there's almost always a lighter side if you'll look for it (Eccl. 3:4). Some of the most joyful people I've met are battling the worst trials. For example, Eric and Leslie Bartel shared horrible days when their precious little Annabelle Grace battled cancer. Nevertheless, the Bartels were a joy-filled inspiration to thousands of people, finding humor when life was anything but humorous.

Laughter bridges the gaps between disjointed generations. Needless to say, our family didn't always see eye to eye. For example, after explaining boys' intentions to my fourteen-year-old daughter, she pronounced, "Oh, Dad, you don't know boys!" We didn't laugh then, but it's one of countless inside jokes and stories that bond us together. What are your family's inside jokes? Italian dogs, Dramamine, and the Trevi Fountain mean nothing to you, but they make my family laugh every time every time we bring them up.

Humor distracts from struggles and redirects to better moments. It helps us not take ourselves so seriously when we fail and it keeps us humble when we succeed. It attracts us to people who choose well. And it's proof that pretty girls really do like boys who make them laugh.

Thankfully, I learned from the best – people like Jeff "I'm just trying to keep my chins up" Hetsel, Robin Westmoreland (who called me "Holy Roller Controller"), Jeff Berggren, Mark Easley, Joe Flanigan, Josh Merriott, and more. These people use the light-heartedness of character to find hope and joy, even when life seems anything but hopeful and joyful. They are living examples of Proverbs 17:22: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

### **What's your "H" character quality?**

Your "H" character quality could be: Happy, Heart, Heaven-minded, Heighten, Heritage, Heroic, Holiness, Honest, Honorable, Hopeful, Hospitable, Humble, Humor, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How well do you, amidst life's challenges, find the light-heartedness of character? What "H" word captures the heart of the character you want for your family, and why?



## I – INTEGRITY

Integrity does the right thing even when others won't, can't, or attack you for trying.

Leadership can be lonely, but leading with integrity puts a target on your chest. Integrity is a light that exposes darkness, and darkness will do anything to avoid the light. It's happened to me too. I've been falsely accused of fraud, lies, deceit, and more. I had a church leader say that a team I was leading was "led by Satan." Despite facing intimidating emails, t-shirts, decorated vans, and more, though, I've found joy. Why? Because we serve for God's applause, not man's applause.

Anyone can be accused, but will people believe you? They will if you're above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:7). For example, while auditing a company, I was accused of being "godlike, arrogant, and rude" and nearly fired. Thankfully, I uncovered millions of dollars of lies before meeting with my accuser's boss. Oh, how I wanted to squash my accuser like a bug, but I had to choose the high road because the only integrity I can control is mine. And, amazingly, my accuser's boss soon hired me for his leadership team . . . which taught me this simple truth:

Accusers will stoop to any level, but integrity will always stand tall.

Although my kids could have picked many great "I" words for their A-to-Z Secret Sauce, I love that they all chose the "I" character quality that I've tried to articulate and live. And although no one always hits the mark, everyday integrity in the many small things can help create kids with grand character. The result: Integrity is all of my kids' "I" word too because they all want their own family to be defined by integrity – the credibility of character.

### **Integrity: The credibility of character**

If there's one quality worth pursuing, it's integrity. Everything begins and ends with the integrity to tell the truth and instill trust. Yes, integrity looks different to everyone, but seeing a group filled with integrity is like looking at a family photo. The physical characteristics may differ, but the resemblance is remarkable.

Typical definitions of integrity include: Conduct conforming to an accepted standard of right and wrong; Devotion to telling the truth; and Faithfulness to high moral standards. People of integrity

strive to be trustworthy, honest, moral, decent, upright, and virtuous. They keep earning credibility chips, even though they don't need them.

Integrity isn't one big belief; it's a culture of believable choices. It acts the same in every situation at work and home. For if you know that I'll never lie for you, you'll also know that I'm never lying to you. So too, in our parenting seminars, we tell parents to not try to talk their way out of problems they act their way into. Integrity, like a shadow, follows you everywhere.

Kids look for credibility markers of trust and confidence, as do team members. For example, integrity was one of my former work team's six guiding principles. Another work team crafted a *Declaration of Inter-dependence*, which included "pursue Christ-like integrity." And when my family created our *Declaration of Him-Dependence*, my son wanted to include "when no one is there to watch" because he had often heard me say: "the true test of a man is what he does when he's out of town alone in a hotel room when no one is there to watch."

Integrity is doing what you say you'll do, at the right times, in the right ways, for the right reasons. Integrity in your principles is crucial, but so is integrity in the process.

### **Integrity in the process**

People need credibility they can count on – in your mission and your method. Don't let your message be missed because your method is misguided. Your great intentions must be highly intentional too. In order to trust you, people need both a credible what and a credible how. People need to trust you in order to entrust you with their trust.

Thus, even after their death, Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Walter Cronkite, and Tom Landry are often listed among the most trusted people because they were honorable and reliable in both their what and their how. Their life callings varied, but they shared the credibility of integrity, the expectation of integrity, and the passionate pursuit of integrity – a core value they lived to the core.

That's why I'm proud that the only two character qualities picked by all four couples of our family were authentic and integrity – two qualities we'll take to heaven and leave behind on earth. For when we authentically live our chosen qualities with integrity, we're both down to earth and above reproach, even when no one is watching . . . even when others won't, can't, or attack you for trying.

### **What's your "I" character quality?**

Pick your "I" character quality: Imaginative, Influence, Ingenious, Initiative, Inquisitive, Inspiring, Instiller, Integrity, Intelligent, Intentional, Interdependent, Intriguing, Invigorate, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How do you try to live with the credibility that enables others to entrust you with their trust? What "I" word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?



## **J – JESUS-FOLLOWER**

Excellent leadership starts with excellent followship. By following the example of Jesus, we can find excellence in others and emulate excellence for others.

Excellence requires a what, a why, and a how. Your what determines your path. Your why determines your passion. Your how determines your success. Jesus followers, though, add a key fourth element: a For-Whom. Who you live for and follow – your For-Whom – determines your significance. Following great leaders can drive great success, but will you experience great significance? It depends on your For-Whom. For which of these three For-Whoms do you live?

First, is your For-Whom you? If so, you can see what you can be. By defining your priorities and refining your habits, you can be successful – a good thing, but not enough.

Second, is your For-Whom others? If so, you can see who you want to be. By casting your vision and crafting your mission, you can be inspiring – a better thing, but it still won't satisfy your soul.

Or third, is your For-Whom Jesus? If so, you can become who you're created to be. By surrendering your destiny and fulfilling your God-given ministry, you can experience the significance of faithfulness. Why? Because you're following Jesus – the source of character.

### **Jesus-follower: The source of character**

Following Jesus is the greatest of all ironies. By surrendering, we can be victors. By kneeling, we can rise. By learning, we can teach. By serving, we can lead. By putting ourselves last, He puts us first. And through our weakness, He is made strong (2 Cor. 12:9). How is all that possible? Because we're not drawing from ourselves; we're drawing from The Source.

Sadly, many people draw their value by their number of followers on social media. But God's version of followship is based on fellowship with Him. In fact, biblical following is the opposite of popularity. Society will often hate you because it hates Him (John 15:18). The power of God's resurrection comes with the fellowship of His suffering (Phil. 3:10).

Then again, as I learned from Jimmy Draper, nothing worth having is easily obtained. Every grand goal requires grand sacrifice. Eternal life is free to us, but it cost Jesus everything. He was the perfect sacrifice because, by denying Himself, He stayed connected to the source of His power – His Heavenly Father. And so can we.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me’” (Matt. 16:24). Jesus-followers are learners, advocates, and devotees. They submit and surrender to His will. They’re guided and captivated by His calling. For the lost, they save. For the saved, they serve. For the serving, they grow. And for the growing, they multiply. Following Jesus isn’t a checklist; it’s process and an absolute privilege.

## Creating disciplers

Creating a family of Jesus-followers isn’t breaking habits or fixing behaviors; it’s bonding with hearts and funneling beliefs. Instead of creating disciples, create *disciplers* who multiply faithfulness through others. Sadly, disciplers are rare. If you type “discipler” into a document, it inserts a red squiggly line because it doesn’t recognize the term. Kids may not recognize the term either, but they recognize the effort. Help your kids want to follow Jesus by wanting to follow you.

You could create an A-to-Z list of words for Jesus-followers – words like: abiding, biblical, Christ-like, disciple, empathetic, faithful, gracious, holy, inspiring, justified, kind-hearted, long-suffering, merciful, nurturing, overcomer, prayerful, quest, redeemed, sanctified, truthful, upright, virtuous, worshipful, xamining, yearning, and zest. These aren’t the A-to-Z character qualities that I chose, but they could be, because they describe who Jesus created us all to be – His followers.

To know Jesus is to follow Jesus. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life – the only way to the Father (John 14:6). His followers conform to His will, which confirms their soul. They obey His commands, so they overflow with His comfort. And by sensing His prompting, they savor His promises. If Jesus is your For-Whom – your resurrected destination – you’re following not only an excellent leader, but also the source of all excellence.

## What’s your “J” character quality?

Which “J” character quality will help you live out your family’s Secret Sauce? Jazzed, Jesus-follower, Jolly, Joyful, Judicious, Juggling, Justice, Justified, or \_\_\_\_\_?

**Questions:** What source of character are you following and living for? What “J” word characterizes what you want for your family, and why?



## K – KIND

Kindness will ooze from your pores when it flows through your veins.

How is it possible? How could Corrie Ten Boom forgive her cruel Nazi concentration camp captor when she saw him after the war? How could Sharletta Evans forgive and embrace her son's killer as if he was her own child? And how about you? How can you forgive someone who hurts you?

It's possible when Christ's kindness covers you from head to toe. Like little Ralphie's brother in the movie, *A Christmas Story*, you can bundle up your kids' hearts with layer after layer of Christ's forgiveness that protects them in even the most frigid seasons of life.

My life trials pale in comparison to Corrie and Sharletta, but we all choose our response to crises. When I was told I wasn't smart enough to be an accountant, I didn't know I'd become a CFO. When a minister wrongly accused me of fraud, I didn't know I would later become a minister. And when a college professor degraded my daughter, I didn't know she'd graduate with great skills and lifelong friends. In each case, I only knew one thing: I had to heed Nathan's advice.

My dear friend, Nathan Jones, taught me many lessons, but the hardest and most important one was this: "Kill 'em with kindness." No matter how badly people may hurt me, they can't control me or my response. Despite my nature to fight to the bitter end – to win for myself – I'm learning to die to myself so that what wins is God's kindness – the caring of character.

### **Kindness: The caring of character**

The first thing that attracted me to my wife (other than, well, you know) was her kindness. No one has to earn Anna's kindness. She freely gives it. Rarely rattled, Anna oozes with kindness because it's how she sees life and the Savior who gives it. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds" (Psalm 145:17).

As a young dad, I knew that kindness covers a slew of errors. But it took years to learn how to raise kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, without provoking their anger (Eph.6:4). Turns out, I was missing the mark until gracious Anna pulled me aside and said, "Honey, do you know you're

almost always either laughing with the kids or upset with them?” Yikes! I was trying to help them, but, turns out, I was correcting too much and caring too little. Anna showed me that kids need both correction and care . . . but if on one side we err, let it be with care.

Every child needs cordial parents, but what they need even more is to see forgiveness and kindness lived out every day. They need care that they don’t have to earn – care that stands when everything else crumbles. They need to enjoy the family reunions shared with the many cousins of kindness.

### **The cousins of kindness**

Kindness has many cousins, two of which are compassion and forgiveness: “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Another cousin is wisdom: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (Prov. 31:26). Four more cousins are listed in Col. 3:12, “Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”

Being kind to others is also kin to anticipating their needs. It’s attentive, sympathetic, and thoughtful. Its good-hearted, hospitable, and unmistakable. Kindness is rooted in the family tree of love. It’s one of love’s first two attributes in 1 Cor. 13:4: “Love is patient, love is kind.” And it’s one of the Holy Spirit’s nine fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Kindness can abound to others when it’s a benevolent spirit within us. It’s what my kids expect of themselves because it’s what their mom modeled for them and expected from them. They saw firsthand what it’s like to be compassionate, courteous, and respectful . . . how to live with an open hand and meet needs without being asked. Kindness isn’t for a few, it’s for all: “be kind to all” (2 Tim. 2:24). Being kind isn’t difficult to understand; it’s just hard to do if your heart isn’t in it.

Then again, what’s not to love about God’s loving kindness? Like layer after layer of clothing, let His kindness bundle you up and warm your heart no matter how cold your today may be.

### **What’s your “K” character quality?**

Examples of “K” character qualities include: Keen, Keeper, Keystone, Kind, Kindred, Kingdom-minded, Kneeling, Known, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How could you model kindness by better caring for your family and others? What “K” word captures the character you want for your family, and why?



## **L – LEGACY-MAKER**

Your legacy isn't what you take with you to eternity, it's who you take with you. And it's not what you leave behind, it's how you help others leave their own legacy.

If your kids chose A-to-Z character qualities, what would they choose for L? Laughter, Leader, Learner, Legacy, Level-headed, Likable, Limitless, Listener, Lively, Longsuffering, Loving, Loyal, or something else?

For the L of my kids' 26 A-to-Z lists, they chose Loving, Learner, and Limitless – words that reflect their unique character, as well as a common home culture. For example, Anna exudes love, I'm a lifelong learner, and together we taught that a loving God gives you a limitless purpose. My L, though, had to be Legacy-maker, a quality I'm still striving to become.

That's why my book, *Well Done, Mom & Dad!*, quotes a letter from my son that includes: "You speak so often of legacy and the impact you want to leave. Your legacy won't be success as a CFO or father who provided for his kids, though those aren't bad things. It will be how you loved and pursued the Lord, and how you bettered His kingdom." Although I cringe at sharing such a personal letter, I've seen it encourage many of our seminar attendees to create a legacy, no matter how their kids have been responding.

Making legacies is all about investing. Smart investors learn from past successes and failures, and they leverage current opportunities for future gains. So too, smart parents keep learning and keep believing that their investments truly will matter one day, even when it makes no sense today. How? Because they're legacy-makers – the perpetuity of character.

### **Legacy-maker: The perpetuity of character**

All Christian parents want happy, godly kids, but how do you turn good intentions into a godly legacy? You can instruct well and even be a role model, but godly legacies don't just happen. We don't just allow them to happen. We don't just hope they'll happen. Godly legacies are created – crafted actually – with two foundational elements: 1) a dream and 2) a plan.

### **Creating a legacy dream**

Creating a legacy dream starts with imagining what you want it to be and prayerfully interceding to make that dream a reality. Imagination and intercession. Purpose bathed in prayer. Realities, not fantasies, awaiting clarity. Legacy dreams are fuel and conviction that draw kids to a place they too can envision, to an understanding they too can have, and to a goal they too can articulate.

A great place to start is with two questions: 1) How were you raised? and 2) Are you the parent you prefer to be, or the parent your kids need you to be? For until you come to grips with how you were raised, how can you grasp how you parent by default? And until you realize the kind of parent you really are, how can you truly meet your kids' needs? And even though we can't go back and answer these two questions earlier, we can answer them now to create the legacy of our dreams.

Without a dream, how will kids aim for the right targets? But dreams need a plan. Without a plan, how will kids know how to get there? Passing down a godly legacy needs both a dream that imagines and intercedes, as well as a plan that instills and improves.

### **Creating a legacy plan**

We can't install a godly legacy on our kids; we must instill it in them. What would you give for your kids to live for God? To hunger and thirst for Him and bear the fruit of His vine? That's the dream for countless Christian parents. It really can happen. And God wants it to happen for you if you'll create a plan for instilling a godly legacy in your kids.

Godly legacies, though, need plans that change as our kids change. One-size-fits-all doesn't work because kids need us to become what they need, not who we prefer to be. Why? Because our kids not only come biologically from us, they also flow emotionally and spiritually from us.

But please don't this mistake . . . don't tie your identity to your kids' choices. Jesus didn't fail because Judas betrayed or Thomas doubted. He succeeded because He fulfilled His God-given purpose. Whether others were faithful or not, Jesus had a dream and a plan to take a legacy of people to heaven and leave a legacy of people doing the same thing on earth.

And so can you.

### **What's your "L" character quality?**

What "L" quality best reflects your heart: Laughter, Leader, Learner, Legacy, Level-headed, Likable, Limitless, Listener, Lively, Longsuffering, Loving, Loyal, or \_\_\_\_\_?

**Questions:** What legacy are you perpetuating both in heaven and on earth? What "L" word reflects the character you want for your family, and why?



## **M – MEMORIES**

You can't touch even one memory for a day, but even one memory can touch you for eternity.

I was 25 years old and clueless. So wise, yet so humble, or so I thought . . . but I was so wrong. Ever been there?

My friend, Floyd Woods, had just returned from a Jamaica vacation. And as a world-class saver (aka cheap), I thought to myself, *Jamaica? Really? Sure, Floyd had fun, but he has nothing to show for it . . . nothing but memories. What a waste.*

Decades later, my quest for “stuff” has been replaced with a quest for something far better, something that lasts for years as well as eternity: bonding memories. So what did I do to make up for lost time? I got a shiny red Miata convertible, of course. What else would a frugal accountant do, at least once he realizes the power of memories – the tattoos of character?

### **Memories: The tattoos of character**

Cherished memories are the glue that holds families together and covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). They have a supernatural, sustaining way of bonding with kids' hearts, funneling their beliefs, and shaping their dreams. These memories remind us of what matters most, and earn the right to nudge our kids' rudder without steering their ship.

What memories are you forging? As your kids look back, what stories will they tell . . . stories about all the things you did wrong, or stories about how you instilled a lifetime of memory tattoos – memories that they can't forget and wouldn't want to?

For why would an accountant buy a two-seater convertible at age 35? Mid-life crisis? Well, if I live to be 70, then 35 is indeed mid-life. No, other than fun, I got it to make memories. We'd drop the convertible top, crank the tunes, and flap our arms in the air. More importantly, it created one-on-one, just-Dad-and-me time. Laughing. Talking about faith and family. Connecting with them, not correcting them. Making memories they can't forget and wouldn't want to.

My Miata was a small way of living out 2 Peter 1:13-15 – stirring up reminders so that kids can recall our life lessons after we're gone. I look back at how my parents did this. Mom showed me how to

serve the least of these, sing at nursing homes, love the unlovely, and respect your spouse. Dad showed me the power of family devotions, serving the needy, sacrificing for family, and spending countless hours playing catch, fishing, hunting, and more. Always together, always making memories of everyday faithfulness.

I wonder: What memories will my kids recall? I know the memories I have of them. I remember Leslie designing her wedding so that her unsaved friends could experience worship. I'll never forget Josh's friends raving about his character at his wedding. And I'll forever be thankful for *50: 50 Pursuits That Matter*, a book that Caleb created on Father's Day, using the 50 blogs that I wrote to help my kids choose their life treasures.

What family memories will your kids recall? What memories do you want them to remember?

Eventually, Anna and I followed the advice of my friend Floyd and created our own Jamaican memories. It was one of the many ways we seared indelible reminders, like tattoos, into our marriage and home. These memories can't be touched, but they also can't be covered up, masked over, or scraped away because they're deep within our soul.

Instead of telling you how to make memories, I want to encourage you to *want* to. And a great place to start is picking your family's A-to-Z character qualities. If you'll choose yours, live it out, and explain why to your family, you can make your own indelible memory tattoos.

Then again, at 59 years old, I've come to the place of wanting different things in life. I now want to be known by the memories I gel and the stories I tell. Day after day, I want to put skin on the skeletons of my kids' character through character-crafting memories. They may wear these memory tattoos unknowingly for now, but one day they'll better understand these tattoos and, even better, they'll want to create their own memory tattoos in my grandkids.

Then my grandkids can buy their own little convertible . . . and we'll flap our arms together.

### **What's your "M" character quality?**

For "M," you might choose Magnetic, Magnify, Mature, Meaningful, Meditative, Memories, Memorable, Mentor, Merciful, Missional, Modest, More, Motivate, Musical, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** What indelible memories are you creating that your kids couldn't forget and wouldn't want to? What "M" word describes the character you want for your family, and why?



## N – NEVERTHELESS

Trials are an obstacle course to faithfulness.

It was so long ago that I still looked like a Baywatch lifeguard. Well, sorta. Walking down a dusty gravel road on a sunny Texas morning with sweat pouring down my face, I was wondering what in the world I was doing. Seriously, why was a shy rural Iowa kid in Texas working at a job I hated – selling Bibles door to door? And then it happened.

A gravel truck roared by. And all that sweat instantly turned into mud. Scraping the mud off my face, I thought: *How bad will this get? After all, this is my first day.* Well, it got worse. Way worse. I worked 80 hours in a week and sold just three Bibles. I was bad. Really bad. So bad that their top recruiter later used me as his example of how bad you can be . . . before becoming successful.

Decades later, my Baywatch body is long gone (except for fake photos), but I’m still proud of three things – my Lord, my family, and my door-to-door success. I’ve faced many trials; nevertheless, my Lord has worked many miracles. I’ve struggled raising kids; nevertheless, my family is truly inspiring. And I was initially an abysmal door-to-door failure, nevertheless, by overcoming I discovered the liberating joy of Nevertheless – the persistence of character.

### **Nevertheless: The persistence of character**

Persistence is the foundation of every good thing in life. Persistence not only won’t quit, it won’t stop until it finds a way. It refuses to be fickle, idle, or inattentive. Persistence is God’s gateway to equipping His children: “We also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulations bring about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint” (Rom. 5:3-5a).

Peter also included persistence in his list of needed qualities: diligence, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and brotherly kindness, love (2 Peter 1:5-7). And James wrote: “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sister, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing

of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

Anna and I picked Nevertheless as our “N” character quality because of Liberty Baptist Church. Like many congregations, Liberty had friendly people, great preaching, and worshipful music. Liberty changed our lives, though, because it was the “Nevertheless Church.”

Liberty was small and nearly broke. Nevertheless, it thrived. We needed \$60,000 in one day, Nevertheless, we received triple the need – \$180,000 of jewelry, coin collections, and whatever we had – our version of the few fish and loaves that Jesus multiplied. We felt like the Macedonian church that was poor, yet gave beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:1-3). It made no sense.

Then again, God loves obedience that make no sense. It made no sense for Noah to build an ark and gather animals. Nevertheless, God used Noah to save mankind. Abraham was crazy to obediently sacrifice his son, Isaac. Nevertheless, Isaac was spared and his lineage led to Jesus. Rahab risked her life to save two Jewish spies. Nevertheless, she became the great grandmother of King David. The Israelites were silly to march around Jericho for seven days. Nevertheless, they marched and Jericho’s walls came crashing down. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Simeon, Paul, Peter, and countless others simply obeyed God and saw the God of Nevertheless do the miraculous.

So too, it made no sense for God to send His son to live a perfect life, die a cruel death, and rise from the dead so that we could join Him in heaven. Nevertheless, He did. And because He did, we can live with His character. We can obey. We can live beyond our ability. We can be God’s Nevertheless Church – people who thrive when it makes no sense, parents who persist when our kids don’t respond, and saints who keep serving despite initial failure.

For even in the darkest days, God is there. He’s there with hope, with joy, with peace. And why is he there for us? Because we are His, and He’s the giver of all perfect gifts (James 1:17) who never forsakes His own (Heb. 13:5, Joshua 1:5). Therefore, whether you’re running through life’s obstacle course like a Baywatch lifeguard or you’re barely crawling on your hands and knees, the God of nevertheless is there for you, cheering you on.

### **What’s your “N” character quality?**

For your “N” character quality, consider: Natural, Neighborly, Nevertheless, Newness, Noble, Nonconforming, Nonetheless, Non-negotiable, Nonstop, Notable, Nurture, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How has God been the God of Nevertheless in your life? What “N” character quality do you want for your family, and why?



## **O – OBEDIENT**

Obedience joyfully submits, no matter how unjoyful and unsubmitive you feel.

Obedience starts at home. I hated obedience as a kid, but as a young parent it's my favorite. With all the complaining, eye-rolling, and stonewalling that come with kids, it's no wonder obedience is our Heavenly Father's favorite too (1 Sam. 15:22).

I wish it was as simple as instructing kids and watching them joyfully obey. But that's too farfetched for even *Fantasy Island* and *The Twilight Zone*. When my kids acted up in church, I put my arm around them and slowly squeezed the muscle between their neck and shoulder. Instant results and no scars. Perfect combo. But instilling obedient hearts is far more than discipline.

Obedience is a godly habit based on a godly heart. It's the outpouring of love: "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands" (2 John 6). Obedience is more than acceptance. Are you preparing your kids to align with, or just accept, God's Word? Are you positioning them for intimacy with God's love, agreement with His purpose, and awareness of His presence. Are you helping them avoid the scars of sin through a heart of obedience – the position of character?

### **Obedience: The position of character**

My young kids knew two things about me: 1) I was an accountant and 2) I never counted to three. The first was my chosen profession; the second, my chosen position. The first paid for their future; the second paved the way a bright future. Many parents count to three, giving extra time to obey. If that's you, though, you're missing the point that delayed obedience is disobedience.

For our "O" Secret Sauce character quality, we choose obedient because it's like a fire starter log to ignite a burning passion for God . . . as long as it positions them to trust Him. I used to tell my kids, "Don't wait until you agree with me before you obey me." Obedience, along with a heartfelt "Yes, sir," defused a whole lot of problems. And God wants the same. God wants a heartfelt, "Yes, Sir" first, followed immediately by heartfelt obedience to His will.

## Compulsion vs Compelling

A boxing champion was asked why his opponent's head was always in the same position when he knocked them out. The champ replied, "Because I hit it there." Well, you can't hit your kids where you want them to go, but you can position them to be receptive. And obedience is all about receptivity, not compulsion. Compulsion complies, but receptivity compels.

Compulsion does what it must do to avoid a worse outcome; compelling does what it can do for a greater outcome. Compliance beats non-compliance, but compelling parents live out Philemon 14: "But without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will." Compelling parents help kids know how to obey . . . and *want* to. They help kids choose joyful obedience for themselves.

God doesn't count to three. Instead, He says: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). But kids also need grace to see how to obey out of love: "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands" (2 John 1:6). We're blessed by obeying His Word (Luke 11:28). We take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5b). "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, for this applies to every person" (Eccl. 12:13).

Obedience is so powerful because it does what's right when it makes no sense. Obedience stands when we kneel, and it rises when we submit. It won't conform to this world because it conforms to the image of God. It submits to God's call upon you, God's Word in you, God's principles for you, God's leaders over you, and God's family through you.

Obedience isn't what you command from others; it's what you cultivate in yourself. It's how you stay full with a spirit-filling God (Eph. 5:18). You're demonstrating it, not demanding it, and exhibiting it before expecting it, so that your kids can emulate it and experience it for themselves . . . not live a life of complaining, eye-rolling, and stonewalling.

## What's your "O" character quality?

Examples of "O" character qualities are: Obedient, Observant, Open, Open-minded, Opportune, Optimistic, Orderly, Original, Outdo, Outstanding, Overcomer, Overflowing, Ownership, or \_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How could you better position your family with a joyful spirit of obedience? What "O" character quality do you want for your family, and why?



## **P – PURPOSEFUL**

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a purpose is worth a thousand possibilities.

José Salvador Alvarenga set out on a Mexican fishing trip in November 2012. Fourteen months and 6,000 miles later, he was discovered on a remote island halfway between Hawaii and Australia. With living as his only purpose, Alvarenga drifted aimlessly and barely survived on a diet of fish, turtles, birds, and rainwater. Our purpose, though, can't be to just survive, drift, and not drown.

We need to live with purpose, live on purpose, and live within God's purpose. Otherwise, we'll drift aimlessly, tread water, live with whatever comes our way, and hope our families can somehow survive life's trials. Life with God-given purpose, though couldn't possibly be more opposite.

One person with a God-given purpose can accomplish more than a thousand people with a possibility. God-given purpose doesn't drift or float along. It charts a bold course, tracks progress, and redirects when blown off course. It may not be painless, perfect, or all planned out, but it's always fulfilling, fruitful, and fascinating.

The letter "P" may be my favorite letter for character qualities. There are 21 possibilities listed at page 56, but if you know my kids, you're not surprised at their selections. Leslie and Ryan picked Present, and if you're with them you know exactly what to expect – they're fully present and engaged with you. Josh and Robyn's chose Prophetic, as they treasure a prophetic word, rightly spoken. For Caleb and Emily, it's Prayerful, as they're couple who knows the value and power of prayer. Anna and I, though, picked a P word that we believe makes everything great in life possible: Purposeful – the rationale of character.

### **Purposeful: The rationale of character**

Purpose is God's rationale – His big Why for you. Why did God create you? I want to discover the answer to that question for me, so that my family can discover theirs. Purpose is the cause propelling your effect. It's what's way down deep inside – your gut, your true self, and your unrelenting standard. It's what you will die for and can't live without, because it's integral to everything and your integrity in everything.

Purpose is your boldness amidst apathy and calm during storms; your last stand and life stance. It's both a mission and a ministry; a goal to accomplish and a calling to fulfill. It's your calling, conviction, and determination no matter what. Bob Buford described it in his excellent book, *Halftime*: "The stuff that stirs within the heart's holiest chamber is, I believe, a gift given to us all by our Creator."

For purpose to be perpetuated, though, it must become practical. One way is "50-20-5-1," a simple exercise in which you select 50 Pursuits that bring you joy, which you narrow down to 20 Priorities that you sacrifice to enjoy and, in turn, down to 5 Passions you'll live for and 1 Purpose you won't live without. It's fun, eye-opening, powerful, and surprising.

For example, my musician son's 1 Purpose was: "To be in tune with God." After doing 50-20-5-1, Anna said: "How sweet to hear our kids' hopes and dreams. It was humbling and a blessing . . . I loved thinking through (it) and seeing on paper what I've known in my heart to be my purpose. What a great family experience." And Leslie's conclusion after 50-20-5-1: "The Holy Spirit is really released. Certain ideas will come to mind that they would have never thought on their own."

### **The fruit of purpose**

What's the result of discovering and living for your God-given purpose? It's the fruit that grows from fulfilled purpose: joy, fulfillment, peace, anticipation, hope, passion, and freedom. These aren't a buffet from which to pick and choose. Instead, the fruit of purpose is a single fruit, with all of them rolled into one. Much like how the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is one fruit with many parts, the fruit of purpose contains inseparable flavors of one gift from God.

If God gives you a purpose (and He does), surely He'll give you a passion to fulfill it . . . if you'll discover it. After struggling for years, I finally discovered mine: "To help my family and others want what they need to be faithful." Even if these 12 words don't mean much to you, they grip my soul. These 12 words are my timeless what in a timeless way for a timeless why, yielding a timeless wow. Why? Because it's God's big why for me. How did God wire you . . . His big why for you?

Purpose isn't a burden. It's fun. It's fruitful. And it's a joy, even when we get blown off course, lost in a sea of trials, or drift along in survival mode . . . because in our weakness He is made strong . . . and we're open to fulfilling God's grand purpose of glorifying Himself.

### **What's your "P" character quality?**

Pick from: Passionate, Patient, Peace, Perceptive, Persuasive, Polite, Possibilities, Positive, Practical, Prayer, Present, Principle, Productive, Propel, Prophetic, Protector, Provider, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How are you living out God's purpose for your life? What "P" character quality would you want to model for your family, and why?



## Q – QUALITY

The ultimate test of your character qualities is the quality of your kids' character.

Uncle Louie was one tough hombre. The Viet Cong army had a bounty on the man they called “lớn màu đỏ” (or “Big Red”) because Louie was such a savage soldier. As a kid, a tractor ran over Louie’s stomach, but he walked away. An attacker sliced open Louie’s stomach, but he lived. And when he accidentally sliced open his hand and blood spewed everywhere, Louie looked nonchalantly at me and said, “Ah, I’m fine.” I always admired Uncle Louie. As tough as he was, though, Louie’s life proved something even more amazing.

The son of a godly welder and grandson of a preacher, Louie didn’t quite fit in. Although his siblings tended to toe the line, Louie was prone to trouble. When his younger brother got the same high school teachers as had Louie, those teachers would skeptically ask, “Are you like your sisters, or are you like Louie?” Below Louie’s crusty exterior, however, was a heart of gold, a true servant, and a ferocious warrior filled with love . . . all mainly due to one reason: he was Loyd’s son.

Grandpa Loyd was proof of the ultimate test of a parent’s character. Like every family, Loyd’s kids didn’t always make ideal choices. But his kids are evidence of how quality results grow out of quality methods, which are born from quality mindsets, which are conceived in quality character. And I couldn’t be prouder that my middle name is Loyd, because Grandpa Loyd spawned multiple generations of faithfulness because he and Grandma lived with quality – the excellence of character.

### **Quality: The excellence of character**

Peanut butter and jelly. Mac ‘n cheese. Salt and pepper. Batman and Robin. Mickey and Minnie. Tarzan and Jane. Fish and chips. Some things just go together. You can’t imagine one without the other. That’s how it is with quality and excellence. Quality and excellence are intertwined and inseparable. Wherever quality goes, excellence follows. The problem is when you expect one without earning the other. That’s why where poor quality goes, mediocrity always follows.

Quality and excellence flow, though, from something else – superior standards. If you want excellent quality at home or work, set a clear standard of what it looks like. Learn to know it when you see it. And hold to those standards so that you and quality become like peanut butter and jelly – people can't think of one without the other.

As a 22-year-old hot shot, I was known at work for speed. But speed isn't the same as quality. Thankfully a boss pulled me aside and said, "Tim, people will forget your speed, but they'll never forget your quality." I had to learn that quality isn't a job; it's how you do your job. It's not a goal; it's a mindset. A mandate. Paul put it this way: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

## Quality homes

Although quality standards, quality control, and quality service are common in business, they're uncommon at home. The same controls, standards, and service that flow from your work, though, will certainly flow into your kids. Therefore, I chose Quality as my "Q" character quality, because I want quality to infuse every aspect of my kids' lives. I can't make them choose it, but I can model it, teach it, and make it easy for them to want it for themselves.

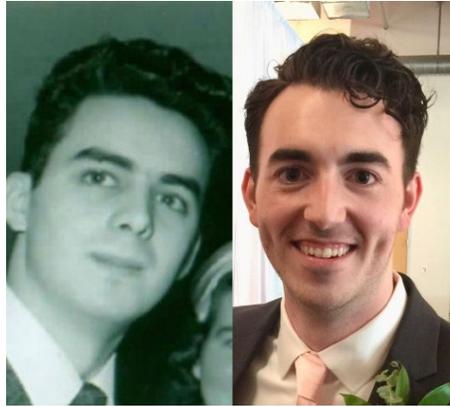
Quality is about your heart as much as it is about your habits. The seeds of caring, constant character need caring, constant quality in order to take root in the next generation. Don't demean the quality of your kids' attitudes and then wonder why your kids are disinterested. Find whatever quality is already in them and celebrate it.

Quality kids come from quality parents, not cookie cutter parents. Grandpa Loyd's kids were proof of that too. All of them were different. All had victories. All failed. But all had a common thread of caring, constant character. And all of them found a way to turn failure into quality character. My many cousins are proof of how a parents' and grandparents' character can live on . . . even if they're the toughest hombre around.

## What's your "Q" character quality?

What's your "Q" character quality? Qualified, Quality, Quest, Questioning, Quick-witted, Quiet, Quips, Quirky, Quizzical, Quotable, or \_\_\_\_\_?

**Questions:** What standards of quality have your kids learn to expect from you? What "Q" word could you pursue to best help your family, and why?



## R – RELATIONAL

Your kids are like you on steroids. For good and bad, they take your character to extremes.

If you described your kids in five words, how would you describe them? When Anna and I did this, we came up with eight qualities (because two words were shared):

Integrity, Authentic,  
 Passionate, Purposeful, Undaunted,  
 Creative, Musical, Relational

These eight words not only paint a portrait of our kids, but also reveal a life-changing lesson – that your kids are like you on steroids. Yes, kids often bear a family resistance. The above photos of my son and my dad prove that. But my son also resembles my dad’s character. So too, all of my kids carry on many of the quirks and qualities that they inherited. The amazing part is watching them embrace and express those qualities with their own unique flair.

Integrity and Authentic – our two shared words – flowed from helping our kids make godly character qualities uniquely theirs! Three of their common qualities – Passionate, Purposeful, and Undaunted – came from my desire for them to know whose they are, how God created them, and why they must choose. And the qualities of Creative, Musical, and Relational were born from Anna, the master of expressive love and teachable moments. Each child also has unique qualities, but they especially share one of God’s greatest qualities: Relational – the conduit of character.

### **Relational: The conduit of character**

It’s said that the most important word in the English language is relationships. Well, that sounds good, but I think that’s wrong. Close but no cigar. Relationships is a noun – a person (who), place (where), or thing (what). Relationships can be good or bad, warm or cold, personal or impersonal. They can even be neutral. Relationships are key, but we need a channel for conveying deeper, lasting, and more meaningful relationships. We need to be relational.

Relational is relationships on steroids. Relational isn't a noun; it's an adjective – it's who you are, regardless of where you are or what you face. It's how you turn good intentions into full attention. My daughter, Leslie, calls it “present.” When you're with Leslie, she's fully present. She engages in you, where you are, and what you're feeling. She's like her relational mother on steroids.

Are you relational? Until my little Southern belle wife came along, I wasn't. But when I met Anna, I suddenly wanted to be relational. Funny how that works. And four decades later, we're still relational because Anna is still my girlfriend. So too, we're still relational with God because He's still our Lord. Thus, relational is our “R” Secret Sauce character quality.

Even more encouraging to me, though, was how my kids chose “R” character words. With an incredibly transparent, impactful approach to relationships, Leslie and Ryan chose “Riskfully-refreshing.” Indeed, they're invigorating conduits of God's love.

Josh and Robyn chose “Restorative” due to their huge hearts for people (and pets). They're conduits of healing, not judging. And even though Caleb and Emily hadn't seen my 26 A-to-Z character qualities, they chose “Relational.” Then again, that's how they live – as conduits of profound, sustaining relationships with each other, with family/friends, and with a relational God.

### **A skill honed, not a skill born**

Thankfully, you don't have to be naturally relational in order to live relationally. It's a skill honed, not a skill born. It's not just for extroverts or experts. It's a choice anyone can make, regardless of personality or circumstances . . . a lens through which you can reveal priorities, a filter you can use to screen out lesser priorities, and a funnel to pour in the greatest priorities.

Yes, I'm shamelessly biased, but I see relational in my kids' eight common qualities. No, my kids don't live out these qualities all the time. No one chooses well all the time (plus they're like me on steroids for bad too). But my kids resemble these eight qualities because they're a child of a Heavenly Father who created these qualities . . . a Father who doesn't need steroids.

In what ways are your kids like you on steroids – for good and bad? What qualities of theirs are extensions of yours? Do relationships flow through their veins and pump life into their friendships? The choice to be relational is theirs, but it starts with you being relational with them.

### **What's your “R” character quality?**

Your “R” character quality might be: Redeemed, Refreshing, Relational, Reliable, Repenting, Resolute, Resourceful, Respectful, Responsible, Restrained, Resurrected, Reverent, Risky, Role-model or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How are your relationships acting as a conduit to improve your kids' relationships? What “R” word depicts the character you want for your family, and why?



## S – SERVANT-LEADER

Servant-leaders are servants who inspire you to be faithful and leaders who help you to want what you need to be faithful.

Which of your kids do you love most? What a ridiculous question. I love both of my sons with equal fervor, albeit in different ways. I call them #1 and #1A because Josh came first. Both sons fill a unique spot in my heart, but I can't favor one or I'd lose them both.

So too with servant-leadership. You can't favor one – service or leadership – because you love it more. To God, favoring one over the other is simply ridiculous. God loves both service and leadership. Equally. Fully. Sacrificially. Unendingly. He created you to do both, albeit in different ways. And even if you tend to love one more, you'll be incomplete without embracing both.

God sees servant-leadership as a duality – one incredible quality with two inseparable parts. But service has to come first. Service is #1, and leadership is #1A. Thus, of all the great “S” Secret Sauce character qualities listed below, mine is Servant-leader – the duality of character.

### **Servant-leader: The duality of character**

Robert K. Greenleaf, who coined the term servant-leader, said, “The servant-leader is servant first... Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” He also said the best test is if those served grow as persons and become servants themselves.

### **#1 – Service**

The epitome of servant-leadership was Jesus, who said, “The greatest among you will be your servant” and “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant” (Matt. 23:11, 20:26). Jesus came to wash the feet of others (John 13:12-17). He didn't “come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

Serving is the tool Jesus uses to draw people to His leadership, open us up to receive His embrace, and become world-changers (Acts 17:6). It meets people’s needs in ways that align with who God created them to be. It’s a what with a how by a who for a why. And it causes a wow.

How did God create you to serve? Did you create you to be vocal, or a silent example? Out front, or behind the scenes? Strategic, or as a gap-filler? No one way is best, but the only right way is the way God created you to serve.

## #1A – Leadership

Service is the first half of servant-leadership. Service (#1) earns the right to lead (#1A), but the latter half – leadership – has three parts, each of which is crucial for a joyful, faithful legacy:

Helping others want  
what they need  
to be faithful.

Leadership starts with three words: “helping others want.” First, leadership helps. It doesn’t force, beg, or cajole. It comes alongside and guides. Second, leadership is all about others, not you. You’re just a catalyst, coach, and conduit. And third, leadership causes others to want something – your help – or at least helps them be more receptive to wanting it. Once you’ve stirred their “want to,” others are ready for the second part of leadership.

The second part of leadership is: “what they need.” Not what you want, what you need, or what they want. Leadership helps others want what they need. Too often, people in leadership roles are in charge, but don’t lead. They focus on their own wants and needs, or they try to accommodate others’ selfish or myopic wants. True leaders focus on what others need, which is much, much harder because it takes significant time, effort, and discipline to learn what others need, instead of projecting your own needs and wants on them.

And third, leaders are stewards. And what is required of every steward is that they be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:12). If you’re not leading others to experience the last part of leadership (“to be faithful”), you’re not leading. Help that doesn’t lead to faithfulness isn’t helpful. You can’t force anyone to receive this kind of help, but you can help them know how to hear, “Well done!” from God and their family . . . and help them want to. Anything less is well intended, but not well done.

Servant-leaders lead by serving, and they serve by leading. Wanting, needing, and faithful are three interwoven strands of one rope called servant-leadership. It doesn’t happen just because you want it. It happens by serving humbly in love (Gal. 5:13) and leading with a wholehearted devotion and a willing mind (1 Chron. 28:9).

I’m convinced that my grandkids can become servant-leaders too because of one reason: their parents are servant-leaders. My kids didn’t choose Servant-leader as their “S” character quality, but they chose words that make it possible: Servant-hearted, Spirit-filled, and Self-disciplined. And if my kids live out

their chosen character qualities, my grandkids will, in turn, likely want what they need to be faithful – another generation of #1 and #1A servant-leadership.

### What’s your “S” character quality?

Examples of “S” character qualities include: Safe, Sanctified, Self-discipline, Sensitive, Sent, Sentimental, Servant-hearted, Servant-leader, Significance, Sincere, Spirit-filled, Strategic, Steward, Supportive, Surrender, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** In what ways could you better serve and lead your family? What “S” word best expresses a character quality you want for your family, and why?

### Great role models

I’ve have many great role servant-leaders– role models like my parents, Jimmy Draper, Mike Shumsky, Randy Whitley, Scotty Sanders, Cletus Glasener, Randy Moresi, and more. By seeing them and others maximize their giftedness and passions, I am learning how to faithfully maximize mine:

- Joe Croce –how to create a successful business with inspiring culture
- Bill Anderson – how to restore trust through unquestioned integrity
- Forbes Anderson – how to empower leaders to lead
- Bob Kulick – how to build a loyal, valued team
- Gary Phillips – how to turn chaos into order
- Larry Harrington – how to relentlessly challenge people to improve
- Mike O’Neal – how to be a shepherd leader who lives his mission
- Len Bussey – how to balance humility with strategic thinking
- Vernon Rae – how to plan and execute for God’s glory
- John Meador – how to turn a physical handicap into a springboard
- Sharon Greving – how to exude grace even in the toughest days
- Anna Alba – how to live every day with grace and understated elegance





## **T – TRANSFORMING**

Your ability to change well determines your opportunity to live well.

Is change good or is it bad? It depends. Proverbs 24:21 says, “Do not associate with those who are given to change.” But Romans 12:2 says to keep on being “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” So how can both be true? The trick is discerning which one applies at any given time.

Some things never change – death, taxes, and every generation thinking it’s the smartest. And in some ways, that’s true. Knowledge of science and technology grow constantly, but knowledge isn’t the same as wisdom. Knowledge enables change, but wisdom applies it with both the roots of unchanging character and the fruits of transforming character. Thus, the “T” of my A-to-Z Secret Sauce of character is Transforming – the metamorphosis of character.

### **Transforming: The metamorphosis of character**

The journey of transformation is much like the journey of a butterfly. A tiny egg transitions into a caterpillar that eats and eats, silently storing up food for later use. To become a butterfly, though, it first becomes a cocoon – a period of apparent dormancy (yet with rapid transformation on the inside) that eventually bursts forth into a beautiful butterfly.

Transformative change doesn’t happen overnight either. It starts small and silent, crawling before it flies. It needs constant nutrition, especially early, to draw from later. It may even look like a cocoon with nothing growing outside, while morphing inside. And when it bursts forth, healthy transformative change floats and soars in beautiful ways.

Kids are butterflies in the making, if only we could see them that way. Too often, we see kids as just caterpillars because we’re too busy, too tired, and too frustrated. But what if we started seeing kids like how God sees them – for whom they can morph into? Here are four types of change and why three of them prevent us from seeing the transformation possible in our kids:

## 4 types of change: Insanity, Absurdity, Naivety, and Transforming

1. Doing the same ol' things in the same ol' ways, and hoping for better. That's **insanity**.
2. Doing different things in the same ol' ways, and expecting better. That's **absurdity**.
3. Doing the same ol' things in different ways, and assuming better. That's **naivety**.
4. Doing different things in different ways, and getting better. That's **transforming**.

Insanity can be easy to see in others. Absurdity and naivety, though, are even more dangerous because different things and different ways feel good, but, by themselves, they leave you distant, frustrated, and unfulfilled. That might be acceptable in some jobs, but not in families. Every child deserves transforming parents. Anything less would be insanity, absurdity, or naivety.

For what is the result of being transformed in Romans 12:2? It's proving and approving God's will. It's fulfillment – being immersed in, infatuated with, building according to, bowing before, standing atop, and relying upon God's good, perfect, and pleasing will – starting with your family.

Families and life come with two options – grow or die. We not only should change, we must change. We can't hunker down with what we know and like. We can't stay in a cocoon forever. Cocoons protect you for a season, but they exist to transition you to a better life. As Dr. Nathan Jones said, it's the result of always making new mistakes. Not different versions of the same ol' mistakes and not being afraid of new things and new ways that keep us on a mission to fulfill our God-given mission. Transformation is the destination of countless little steps.

Granted, not all change is good, but God-honoring change always transforms us. “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). And that happens by replacing old, comfortable ways with new, transforming ways . . . by agreeing with God, not man (Mark 1:14-15, Acts 17:29-31).

Putting your family on the path to transformation starts with you changing. But the change that truly transforms comes from a change-less God who can turn ugly ol' caterpillars like us into beautiful butterflies that fly. That's not insanity, absurdity, or naivety. That's transforming!

### What's your “T” character quality?

Is your family's “T” character quality: Tactful, Teachable, Teacher, Tenacious, Tender, Timeless, Thankful, Thoughtful, Thriving, Trainer, Transforming, Transparent, Trustworthy, Truthful, or \_\_\_\_\_?

**Questions:** How are you letting God use you to transform your family's character? What “T” word denotes the character you want for your family, and why?



## U – UNENTITLED

Humility is a prize pursued, not a prize possessed.

“Yea, me!” My toddler daughter loved shouting those two words. Incredibly cute for toddlers, but not so cute for adults. As adults, self-absorption and selfishness don’t get better; they just get subtler. We may not say, “Yea, me,” but we act like it. We demand rights, insist we deserve what we don’t earn, and act entitled.

In today’s world, it’s easy to feel entitled. For example, have you watched daytime TV lately? “Get what you deserve.” “You’re entitled.” “You deserve it.” Romans 6:23, though, says we deserve death; still, God offers us eternal life. And the gateway to enjoying the joy that come with this eternal life is experiencing one of God’s favorite qualities: unentitled – the humility of character.

### **Unentitled: The humility of character**

Some people think entitlement is new to millennials. Nope. It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Eve’s temptation wasn’t about eating fruit; it was about entitlement – that she should be able to be like God (Gen. 3:4-5). Then again, entitlement starts stealthily, like sin. Humility, though, starts with bold action – searching out entitlement and rejecting it, not rationalizing it.

Many parents rationalize poor choices and assume no consequences. But you’ll likely see your selfishness and pride in your kids because it’s harder to swallow your pride than to swallow the pill of entitlement. Thankfully, there’s a better pill . . . a cure that acts like an emotional and spiritual version of Pepto Bismol by coating and soothing your spirit – the pill of humility.

If you ever achieve humility, you’ve lost it. But the pursuit of humility is a beautiful journey with a bountiful harvest. It the fruit of countless un’s . . . Unassuming. Unselfish. Unwavering. Uncompromising. Undaunted. Unafraid. It may even seem unbelievable at first, but God’s family knows it’s an unbroken promise of unimaginable peace.

### **Humble-conviction**

Humility by itself, though, isn’t enough. We need “humble-conviction” – humility balanced with conviction. If your humility exceeds your conviction, you’re aiming too low and not fulfilling your

God-given potential. And if the opposite is true – your conviction outstrips your humility – you’re presumptive or cocky. Either way, you’re unfaithful and missing the mark.

The key to faithful kids is faithful parents who hit the mark. Your kids need you to model both ethics and work ethic, not complacency and coddling. Inclusive, without fake tolerance. True humility is not weakness; it’s meekness – strength under control. And Jesus loves meekness so much, He said: “Bless are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

God’s love of humility is clear. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3).

Another fact is also clear about humility – it’s easier to pass it down if you’ve seen it. Because my dad is the most humble, giving man I know, it’s easier to pass down humility to my kids. Easy? No. But easier because my dad’s unentitled spirit is so inspiring, as is my mom’s. It’s not a trophy; it’s a witness and an opportunity to bless. It’s a prayer with God’s favor, not a path for our favorites.

Although we prepare for God’s blessing, we can’t feel entitled to it. Although God owes us nothing, He gives us eternal life that’s neither earned nor deserved (Eph. 2:8-9). And although we’re entitled to the penalty of sins, God forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

And what does God ask in return? To replace “Yea, me” with “Yea, Thee” . . . to humbly kneel before Him. For when we kneel low on earth, we stand tall in heaven.

And that’s the ultimate gift you can give your kids – a prize that can be both pursued and possessed.

### **What’s your “U” character quality?**

Here are “U” character qualities in choosing your Secret Sauce of A-to-Z character qualities: Unafraid, Unassuming, Unconventional, Undaunted, Understanding, Understated, Unentitled, Unintimidated, Unique, Unrelenting, Unselfish, Unwavering, Upright, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** How would your kids describe your humility? What “U” word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?



## **V – VISIONARY**

Vision – the ability to turn what is into what can be – is what turns a godly parent into a godly legacy.

If vision is so crucial, though, why is it so hard to understand and even harder to pass down? And if companies can have a vision, why can't families? Why can't families also articulate why they exist, where they want to go, and, most importantly, who they want to become? The truth is that they can. And so can your family . . . if you'll become a visionary family.

### **Visionary families**

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, or to a goal you cannot communicate.” And nowhere does this apply more than at home. How well do you understand and communicate your family vision? Does your family know? More importantly, do *you* know where you want to lead your family?

Your kids don't need you to be a vision guru; they just need you to know who they are and who they can be . . . how to envision their possibilities and make them a reality . . . and, most importantly, how to lead them to *want to* be visionary. Being visionary, though, isn't for the ultra-intelligent; it's for the ultra-intentional. And anyone, including you, can be intentional.

There are many great “V” character qualities, but if you want valor, vibrancy, and vulnerability to flow from your kids, they need you to be a forward-thinker, not a past-lamenter. A visualizer of what can be, not a victim of what's always been. They need you to be a role model of one of the greatest of all character qualities: visionary – the horizon of character.

### **Visionary: The horizon of character**

If it's true that everything rises and falls on leadership, then leadership rises and falls on vision. Vision sees across the horizon of time – yesterday, today, and tomorrow. But it also sees the person. This kind of vision is possible because it comes from God whose vision spans the horizon of your life. He created you in His own image, redeems you today when you fail, and promises you an eternity with Him in heaven.

Every family vision is unique because God created every family to be unique. Next week's secret sauce blog (W – Well done) describes my family's vision, but here are three elements common for family visions that you might consider in articulating, modeling, and communicating yours: Character, Excellence, and Faithfulness.

### **A vision of character**

If you can envision and articulate one quality in your kids, make it their character. As a young dad, I focused my attention on my kids' behavior, but later realized how wrong I was. I had to learn the hard way that behavior flows from habits, and habits flow from choices, and choices flow from character. I had to gain a vision of my kids' character so that I could better highlight it, celebrate it, and get it back on track when it veered off. And I had to begin seeing my kids for who they could become if they'd let God align their want-to with His will.

### **A vision of excellence**

Character makes everything possible, but character without excellence is disappointing at the least and disheartening at the worst. Imagine, just imagine, your kids twenty or thirty years from now if the quality of their hearts intersected the quality of their habits like two targets on top of each other. The challenge is to not do what's natural. Don't try to force it, fight it, or figure it all out. Instead, study your kids. Gaze at the giftedness that God intends for His glory. And become "fluent" in your kids' abilities so that they can become exceptional, not the exception.

### **A vision of faithfulness**

According to George Barna, we're all in "the process of motivating, mobilizing, resourcing, and directing . . . to passionately and strategically pursue a vision from God that a (family) jointly embraces." What's your family vision? Does it begin with the end in mind? Does it focus on the one thing that truly matters – hearing, "Well done" from God and family?

You may express it differently, but are you unleashing and enlivening your family's character, excellence, and faithfulness? If you will, you'll become a visionary who turns what is into what can be for generations and generations and generations to come.

### **What's your "V" character quality?**

The "V" of your 26 A-to-Z Secret Sauce of character qualities could be: Validating, Valor, Values, Versatile, Vibrant, Vigorous, Virtuous, Visionary, Vitalize, Vivid, Vulnerable, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** What vision are you casting for your family, and could they describe it? What "V" word describes the character you want for your family, and why?



## W – WELL-DONE

Make it your mission . . . to make it your kids' mission . . . to hear, "Well done!"

MLK had a dream – that his kids would be judged by the content of their character. I too have a dream – a defining mission. It's so vivid, so enrapturing, so consuming because, like MLK's dream, it's about how my kids' character will be judged. It starts as I enter heaven . . .

### **My dream**

My eyes are opening from a fog and my chest is actually pounding. It's as if a veil has suddenly been lifted. For the first time, my life has perfect clarity. Struggles, so hard to explain at the time, had been interlocking pieces of a grand puzzle. People, even those forgotten, are hugging me. Turns out, my random acts of kindness had been providential pieces of their life stories.

As I stand in awe, soaking it all in, it happens. I look up, see Jesus, and feel inexpressible joy and indescribable reverence, even more than I could have imagined. Instinctively, I drop to my knees and fall face first to the ground. As my Lord runs from His throne with the most amazing, loving grin, He picks me up and whispers in my ear, "Tim, I've been waiting for you soooo long!"

I want to shout or praise, but I'm utterly speechless. All I can do is bury my head in His chest and receive His warm embrace. Looking piercingly into my tear-filled eyes, He says, "Welcome home, Tim!" And with a subtle nod and a few tears of His own, He utters these intimate words, "Thank you for making it easy for your family to love me too! Well done, Dad!"

### **A new dream**

That was my personal dream for decades. But then God gave me a new dream, a dream so glorious that it changed everything. That dream: Watching Jesus do the same *with my kids*!! No, I can't make this happen for my kids. I can't cajole, beg, or force it on them. But I can do everything possible to help my kids join me in experiencing God's "well-done" – the finale of character.

## Well-done: The finale of character

The finale of godly character is laid out in the parable of the talents: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master’” (Matt. 25:21). More than the destination of faithfulness, well-done is the finale of faithfulness and the motivation for pursuing it.

Well-done faithfulness isn’t what you do when you know the Master is watching; it’s what you do when you think he’s not watching. It isn’t even about maximizing your rewards; it’s about maximizing your opportunity, whether it’s a little or a lot.

And remember the result of “Well done!” It’s more responsibility, not more rest. And with more responsibility comes more accountability and more crowns to lay at the Master’s feet. And with more crowns comes an even more excited embrace with the Master.

The biblical word for “well done” isn’t casual gratitude. It has a peculiar force and energy that’s hard to describe in English. It describes how onlookers give their highest applause for excellence. Now, try to imagine God standing from His mercy seat and giving His highest applause for your faithfulness. And why wouldn’t He? After all, He’s your Father, you’re His child, and you’ve made Him so incredibly proud. He’s not just accepting you; He’s applauding! No longer a slave, He’s yours, you’re His, and you’re entering into His joy as a 100% heir of His kingdom.

Praise from family and friends is great, but the only praise that truly matters is God’s. We can do good, but good-enough isn’t well-done. And we can have great intentions, but well-intended isn’t well-done. Well-done is running your race well, helping others run theirs, and finishing strong.

The Apostle Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7) and “I press on toward the goals for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). Paul’s passion was “if only I may finish the course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24).

For although my kids picked Worship, Worshipping, and Worshipful as their “W” Secret Sauce character quality word, their worship will always be rooted in a family dream of “Well-done!”

## What’s your “W” character quality?

The “W” of your A-to-Z Secret Sauce of character qualities might be: Warm, Warrior, Well-done, Well-spoken, Wholesome, Willing, Winsome, Wise, Witness, Worry-free, Worshipful, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** If your kids followed your example so far, what would Jesus say about their character? What “W” word communicates the character you want for your family, and why?



## **X – XTRAORDINARY**

Kids rarely rise above their parents’ level of exceptionalism and their mediocrity.

In a world of participation trophies and tenth-place ribbons, extraordinary people are increasingly rare. It’s not due to a lack of knowledge. We’re more knowledgeable than ever. It’s also not due to education. More people are educated too. So why is extraordinary not ordinary? Of the many reasons that mediocrity runs rampant, I believe the main culprit is a crisis of character.

The key to being an extraordinary kid is having parents who model extraordinary character. Your kids won’t inherit a financial fortune if you lack financial wealth, and they won’t inherit a fortune of character if you aren’t a wealth of character. Therefore, we need to pursue character like hidden treasure because we can’t pass down what we don’t possess.

No one wants to do mediocre work at a mediocre job, drive to a mediocre home, hug a mediocre spouse, play with mediocre kids, pray to a mediocre god, eat mediocre food, and one day have mediocre friends stand over a mediocre tombstone engraved, “Here lies Bob. He was mediocre.” But if you take whatever society and circumstances give you, your kids will inherit mediocrity. Thus, why my “X” Secret Sauce character quality is Xtraordinary – the effect of character.

### **Xtraordinary: The effect of character**

If extraordinary was a simple recipe, it would be ordinary. But extraordinary isn’t a checklist, a formula, or a Google download. It’s the effect when extraordinary people consistently live remarkably, inspiringly, and exceptionally. It’s highly unusual because few people stir up, stand with, and step out for what’s right. But I’ve been blessed to know many such heroes who uniquely affect others with the effects of extraordinary character.

Inevitably, these heroes are learners who find hope amidst trials. They don’t seek trials, but they seek to learn the Apostle Paul’s secret for hope: “We also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulations bring about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:3-5a).

Hopeful kids aren't born. They're forged. Lesson by lesson. Trial after trial. Each trial births perseverance, character, and hope. This isn't a quick fix or prepackaged recipe. It's a secret sauce unique to your family that marinates and sautés slowly through trials. That's why I encourage parents to choose their own 26 A-to-Z secret sauce of character qualities for their family . . . so that by living them out, you'll help your kids find extraordinary hope when they're parents too.

### **Participation trophies or Purposeful trophies**

If you want your kids to win purposeful trophies, not participation trophies, know which is the cause and which is the effect. A character-filled culture is the cause. Extraordinary is the effect. Extraordinary parents aren't necessarily better than others, but they're the best possible version of themselves. They can raise fantastic students because they hold themselves to fantastic standards. They can have high expectations of their kids because their kids already see how it's done. And their kids can believe in themselves because they believe in their parents.

While I love my 26 character qualities, you'll prefer yours because God made you to be unique. For example, the 350 A-to-Z qualities at [www.timalba.com](http://www.timalba.com) can create 4.4 octillion combinations. That's a 4.4 with 27 zeros. Therefore, the secret to passing down a godly legacy isn't the specific 26 words you choose; it's how to choose to live out those 26 words. Whatever qualities you choose, live them in the most remarkable, inspiring, and exceptional ways possible. Why? So that regular ol' kids can learn from regular ol' parents how to become extraordinary examples of character.

The Bible is full of regular ol' people that God used in extraordinary ways. Gideon was cowering when God called him to lead a nation. Esther was a young exile who became the queen. Moses led the exodus despite a speech impediment. Peter and John were unlearned, yet turned the world upside down. They all became extraordinary heroes because they chose extraordinary character . . . not the character that wins participation trophies.

### **What's your "X" character quality?**

Examples of "X" character qualities include: Xacting, Xamining, Xany, Xcellence, Xceptional, Xciting, Xemplary, Xperiencing, Xplore, Xpressive, Xtraordinary, Xuberant, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** Would your kids describe your character as phenomenal, outstanding, and spectacular, or do they have to look to others for that kind of extraordinary example? What "X" word captures the spirit of the character you want for your family, and why?



## Y – YOUNG-HEARTED

The secret to aging gracefully is having the wisdom of the aged and the youthfulness of the ageless.

I have a confession . . . I’m just as boring as I appear.

When I said that to my wife, she said, “I *love* boring.” I assumed she meant, “And boring is sexy.” Yep, that’s my story and I’m sticking to it. Anna and I have laughed over the years about how I’m both the epitome and the antithesis of boring. It all depends on how you define boring.

When my kids were young, they thought I was a dinosaur – old-fashioned and unable to adapt to their expectations. But as they’ve aged, my kids better understand the two sides of their “boring” father – 1) a passion for predictable character and 2) a pursuit of staying young at heart. I call this combo: “content but never satisfied.”

### **Side #1: Predictable: The confidence of character**

One of the greatest gifts that my parents gave me was knowing what I could expect of them every single day. What they believed, they lived. Their character didn’t take days off, which gave me an unquestioned confidence that I was loved and safe – bedrock qualities that most kids can only dream of. My parents weren’t perfect; just predictable.

So, yes, if “boring” is being predictable, I’m guilty, and always hope to be guilty, and hope my kids and grandkids will be guilty. They don’t need to follow my ways of predictability, as long as their ways lead to faithfulness. But predictability is just one side of the coin. The other side is equally important for kids to want to carry on a godly legacy: the “Y” character quality of our family secret sauce: Young-hearted – the youthfulness of character.

### **Side #2: Young-hearted: The youthfulness of character**

Youthfulness can be enjoyed by the young, but it’s not fully appreciated until you’re old enough to learn from the past and still be excited about the future. Then you find real joy and experience real life because you know the real hope found in Jesus. Sure, you’ll get a few wrinkles and scars, but those little imperfections are outward trophies of internal victories. No matter your age or health, you can overcome the bad days with a youthful conviction that great days are ahead.

Too often, people focus on staying young-looking without staying young-hearted. They want the appearance of youth while hiding the reality of age. Instead of embracing the great things that come with age, they cling to a false hope of avoiding the not-so-great things that come too.

As a young man, I had to decide: spend a fortune on hair restoration, or embrace my baldness. Instead of doing a crazy comb-over, I choose to laugh about it. One of my favorite jokes is: “Do you know why I’m bald?” After people shake their head no, I continue, “Because it wouldn’t be fair if I had the WHOLE PACKAGE!” No, I don’t believe it either, but I believe this: I may not look young, but I can act it. I can age gracefully by staying young at heart.

Thankfully, there are many ways to stay youthful. Anna stays young by serving and relating to others. I, though, love to discover and learn. When I resigned my role at Cross City Church, I didn’t know what I would do next, but I knew I would get away and discover something new. So I did what any 57-year old former CFO and Executive Pastor would do . . . I took my wife to Antarctica and hang glided in Rio de Janeiro (hence, the attached photo).

### **Staying young at heart & staying true to you**

Am I a daredevil? Hardly. I’m a recovering perfectionist and accountant. But bland? A dinosaur? No way. I refuse to be stodgy because I can’t connect with my kids if I can’t connect with what matters to them. I must stay young at heart while staying true to myself. Thus, I’ll always be predictable, but I’ll never stop blaring a great rock-n-roll tune. Conservative, yet a little crazy.

You don’t need to act like our kids; you need to lead them. You can by being a role model of the Apostle Paul’s secret: content in everything (Phil 4:11-13) but never satisfied with who you are in your journey to faithfulness – both the epitome and the antithesis of “boring.”

Whatever keeps you young, use it for God’s glory and others’ good. If you will, even when your aching joints say you’re old, your character will keep you young . . . even when your kids think you’re boring.

### **What’s your “Y” character quality?**

Examples of “Y” character qualities include: Yearning, Yes, Yes-ma’am, Yoke-breaker, Yoked, Young-hearted, Youthful, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** What could you do (or start doing again) to model being young-hearted for your family? What “Y” word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?



## Z – ZEALOUS

Purpose is what you're called to do; passion, what you're compelled to do . . . a quest with a zest.

A mother's love. There's nothing like it. Don't mess with momma bear's cubs because her bond is undeniable. It's unending. Unwavering. Unbreakable. A mother's love is zealous. She'll do anything, give anything, and forgive anything for her kids. It's what she feels compelled to do because it's what she feels called to do.

Like many dads, I adore my family. Next to faith, they'll always be my priority. I have a role that Anna could never fill. But I'm not competing; I'm completing our family as no one else can. And that's what God-honoring passion does – it completes God-given purpose like nothing else can. Sure, the word "passion" is overused and misused, but we'll always feel empty if we lack it.

### **A quest with a zest**

I desperately want that kind of zealous passion. A quest with zest. A zeal that's deep down within me, not beat down into me. I can't fully describe people who are purposefully courageous and passionately contagious, but it's obvious. Purpose fills you up; passion fires you up. And if God gives you a purpose, He'll surely give you a passion to fulfill it. Therefore, the "Z" of my family's 26 A-to-Z secret sauce of character qualities is Zealous – the passion of character.

### **Zealous: The passion of character**

What consumes you? What stirs your soul? What makes you desperate and dependent – the two prerequisites for zealous passion?

Zealous passion doesn't burn up or burn out. It passes up the good to pass along the great. It loves the unlovely, believes the unbelievable, and forgives 70 x 7 times without keeping score. It surrenders to dreams without giving up on them. 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.

Zeal doesn't flip flop, fade, or rely upon yesterday's victory for today's joy. It yields faithful assurance and fruitful action (Hebrews 11:1, Galatians 5:22-23). It doesn't just claim something matters; it has the conviction to see it through. Zeal is the proof that defines you.

### **What defines you?**

If you asked your family and friends to pick three words to define you, what three words would they choose? When I resigned from my pastoral job, my church graciously celebrated my wife and me, gave me a priceless gift, and shared the three words that they felt described me. I'll always cherish that day and those three words, one of which was, you guessed it, Passion.

If you picked three words to define all of my kids, passion would surely be one of those words. They have unique skills, but they all share a quality with their daddy – a zeal that's impossible to miss and hard to dismiss. It's not conjured up; it's unleashed. My kids, though, couldn't copy my passion; they had to discover their own. What they saw in me when they were young, they now crave as adults, albeit in their own ways . . . with their own quirks . . . with their own passions.

### **Hinder it or kindle it**

You can rarely, if ever, make someone zealous, but your choices will do one of two things: you'll hinder it or you'll kindle it. Zeal can be doused like charcoal by isolating it, but you can stoke it by surrounding yourself with those "zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). Paul too challenged us to "never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

Some people are zealous for popularity, beauty, power, money, or fame, but those passions fade quickly. Instead, I pray for people and process. I'm naturally driven to learn, lead, strategize, prevent, solve, and instill. But with God's grace, I want to be compelled by a far greater zealous passion – to lead myself and others to hear "Well done!" from God and family. My compelling passion may not impress some people, but it's a deep, consuming zeal that stirs my soul.

My family's 26 A to Z character qualities start with authenticity – the reality of character – and end with zeal – the passion that makes authenticity real. How does your character quality begin and end? For what consumes you in private will compel you in public . . . like a mother's love.

### **What's your "Z" character quality?**

Examples of "Z" character qualities include: Zany, Zeal, Zero-excuses, Zest, Zip, Zoned-in, Zoo, Zoomed-in, or \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions:** If you asked your family to describe you in three words, what words would they pick? What "Z" word captures the essence of the character you want for your family, and why?

## A-TO-Z CHOICES

(Select one word for each letter)

**A** – Abide / Achieve / Affirm / Admirable / Adventure / Agreeable / Aligned / Ambitious / Amiable / Appreciative / Artistic / Ascend / Attentive / Authentic / Awaken / \_\_\_\_\_

**B** – Basic / Beacon / Beliefs / Believable / Belonging / Beloved / Best-practices / Biblical / Big-hearted / Bold / Bonding / Boundless / Brave / Bright-eyed / \_\_\_\_\_

**C** – Candid / Captivating / Caring / Challenging / Character / Cheerful / Christ-like / Choices / Commit / Communicate / Compassion / Compelling / Composed / Confident / Consistent / Contented / Cooperative / Courageous / Courteous / Curious / \_\_\_\_\_

**D** – Daring / Decisive / Dedicated / Dependable / Determined / Devoted / Dignified / Diligent / Direct / Discerning / Discreet / Disciplined / Dreamer / Driven / \_\_\_\_\_

**E** – Eager / Earnest / Educated / Effective / Elevate / Embolden / Empathy / Empowering / Encourage / Endurance / Engage / Enhance / Enliven / Enthusiastic / Ethics / \_\_\_\_\_

**F** – Facilitate / Fair / Faithful / Family / Fearless / Fellowship / Fervent / Fidelity / Flexible / Flourish / Focus / Forgiving / Friend / Fulfill / Fun / Funny / Futuristic / \_\_\_\_\_

**G** – Galvanize / Generous / Gentle / Giver / Glowing / Goal-oriented / Godly / Good-natured / Graceful / Gracious / Grateful / Guilt-free / \_\_\_\_\_

**H** – Happy / Heaven-minded / Heighten / Hero / Heroic / Heritage / Holiness / Honest / Honorable / Hopeful / Hospitable / Humble / Humor / \_\_\_\_\_

**I** – Imaginative / Independent / Influence / Ingenious / Initiative / Inquisitive / Inspiring / Instiller / Integrity / Intelligent / Intentional / Interdependent / Intriguing / Invigorate / \_\_\_\_\_

**J** – Jazzed / Jesus-follower / Jolly / Joyful / Judgment / Judicious / Juggling / Justice / Justified / \_\_\_\_\_

**K** – Keen / Keeper / Keystone / Kind / Kind-hearted / Kindle / Kindred / Kingdom-minded / Kneeling / Knowledge / Known / \_\_\_\_\_

**L** – Laughter / Leader / Learner / Legacy / Legitimate / Level-headed / Likable / Limitless / Listener / Lively / Logical / Longsuffering / Loving / Loyal / \_\_\_\_\_

**M** – Magnetic / Magnify / Mature / Meaningful / Meditative / Memories / Memorable / Mentor / Merciful / Missional / Modest / More / Motivate / Musical / \_\_\_\_\_

**N** – Natural / Neat / Neighborly / Nevertheless / Next-step / Noble / Nonconforming / Nonetheless / Non-negotiable / Nonstop / Notable / Nurture / \_\_\_\_\_

**O** – Obedient / Observant / Open / Open-minded / Opportune / Optimistic / Orderly / Original / Outdo / Outstanding / Overcomer / Overflowing / Ownership / \_\_\_\_\_

**P** – Passionate / Patient / Peaceful / Perceptive / Persistent / Persuasive / Pleasant / Polite / Positive / Practical / Prayerful / Present / Principle / Problem-solver / Productive / Progressive / Propel / Prophetic / Protector / Provider / Prudent / Purposeful / \_\_\_\_\_

**Q** – Qualified / Quality / Quest / Questioning / Quick / Quick-witted / Quiet / Quips / Quirky / Quizzical / Quixotic / Quotable / \_\_\_\_\_

**R** – Redeemed / Refreshing / Relational / Reliable / Repenting / Resolute / Resourceful / Respectful / Responsible / Restorative / Restrained / Resurrected / Reverent / Risking / Role-model / \_\_\_\_\_

**S** – Safe / Sanctified / Self-discipline / Sensitive / Sentimental / Servant-hearted / Servant-leader / Significance / Sincere / Spirit-filled / Strategic / Steward / Supportive / \_\_\_\_\_

**T** – Tactful / Teachable / Teacher / Tenacious / Tender / Timeless / Thankful / Thoughtful / Thriving / Trainer / Transforming / Transparent / Trustworthy / Truthful / \_\_\_\_\_

**U** – Unafraid / Unassuming / Unconventional / Undaunted / Understanding / Understated / Unentitled / Unique / Unintimidated / Unrelenting / Unselfish / Unwavering / Upright / \_\_\_\_\_

**V** – Validating / Valor / Values / Valuing / Veracity / Versatile / Vibrant / Vigorous / Virtuous / Vision / Visionary / Vitalize / Vivid / Vulnerable / \_\_\_\_\_

**W** – Warm-hearted / Warrior / Well-done / Well-read / Well-spoken / Wholesome / Why / Willing / Winsome / Wise / Witness / Worry-free / Worship / Worshipful / \_\_\_\_\_

**X** – Xacting / Xamining / Xany / Xcellence / Xceptional / Xciting / Xemplary / Xpedite / Xperiencing / Xploring / Xpressive / Xtend / Xtraordinary / Xuberant / \_\_\_\_\_

**Y** – Yearning / Yes ma'am / Yoke-breaker / Yoked / Young-hearted / Youthful / \_\_\_\_\_

**Z** – Zany / Zeal / Zero-tolerance / Zest / Zip / Zoned-in / Zoo / Zoomed-in / \_\_\_\_\_

## A-TO-Z CHARACTER QUALITIES

(Summarize your A-to-Z words)

A- \_\_\_\_\_  
B- \_\_\_\_\_  
C- \_\_\_\_\_  
D- \_\_\_\_\_  
E- \_\_\_\_\_  
F- \_\_\_\_\_  
G- \_\_\_\_\_  
H- \_\_\_\_\_  
I- \_\_\_\_\_  
J- \_\_\_\_\_  
K- \_\_\_\_\_  
L- \_\_\_\_\_  
M- \_\_\_\_\_  
N- \_\_\_\_\_  
O- \_\_\_\_\_  
P- \_\_\_\_\_  
Q- \_\_\_\_\_  
R- \_\_\_\_\_  
S- \_\_\_\_\_  
T- \_\_\_\_\_  
U- \_\_\_\_\_  
V- \_\_\_\_\_  
W- \_\_\_\_\_  
X- \_\_\_\_\_  
Y- \_\_\_\_\_  
Z- \_\_\_\_\_

## Secret Sauces – Alba Parents & Kids

Each couple's list reflects their character. Josh and Robyn's list signifies their nature (Quirky), love for animals (Zoo), and sensitive hearts (Grace). Words like Present, Overflowing, and Yoked show Leslie and Ryan's passion for abiding relationships. Caleb and Emily's words like Grateful, Vulnerable, and Yielding, reveal a desperation for God. Just imagine what your family's 26 words could reveal about them and the secret sauce of craveable character with which you're flavoring them.

<u>Tim &amp; Anna</u>	<u>Leslie &amp; Ryan</u>	<u>Josh &amp; Robyn</u>	<u>Caleb &amp; Emily</u>
Authentic	Authentic	Authentic	Authentic
Beliefs	Bold	Boundless	Big-hearted
Choices	Confident	Courageous	Courageous
Devotion	Dreamers	Dreamer	Discerning
Encourager	Empowering	Endurance	Endurance
Family	Fearless	Focus	Forgiving
Generous	Gracious	Grace	Grateful
Humor	Hopeful	Holiness	Holiness
Integrity	Integrous	Integrity	Integrity
Jesus-follower	Joyful-in-hope	Jazzy	Joyful
Kind	Known	Keeper	Kingdom-minded
Legacy-maker	Limitless	Learner	Loving
Memories	More	Music	Merciful
Nevertheless	Non-conforming	Newness	Non-conforming
Obedience	Overflowing	Overcomer	Obedient
Purpose	Present	Prophetic	Prayerful
Quality	Quick-to-obey	Quirky	Quality
Relational	Riskfully-refreshing	Restorative	Relational
Servant-leader	Servant-hearted	Spirit-filled	Self-discipline
Transforming	Trust & trust again	Thriving	Teachable
Unentitled	Unwavering	Unrelenting	Unafraid
Visionary	Visionary	Valor	Vulnerable
Well-done!	Worshippers	Worship	Worshipful
Xtraordinary	Xany	Xmas!	Xmas
Young-hearted	Yoked	Young-hearted	Yielding
Zealous	Zealous	Zoo	Zany

## Next Steps

**Free Gift:** For a free frame-able graphic of 26 A-to-Z character quality words, email your 26 words to: [timalbawd@gmail.com](mailto:timalbawd@gmail.com) or [timalba.com](http://timalba.com). It is my gift to help you choose your own well-done legacy of godly character and pass it on to your family.

**Free Blog:** In order to receive bi-weekly help in hearing, “Well done!” from God and family, please subscribe to my blog at [timalba.com](http://timalba.com). Topics include: parenting/family, marriage, personal leadership, and faithfulness.

**Practical Guide:** If you want help for you and your family to take practical next steps toward creating the godly, vibrant family that you’ve always wanted, order your own copy of my two books: *Well Done, Mom & Dad!: A Practical Guide to Turn Good Intentions into Godly Legacies* and *HEALTHY Home: A Practical Guide to Build a Spiritually Vibrant Family . . . Starting with You*. Both are available on Amazon or email me at [timalbawd@gmail.com](mailto:timalbawd@gmail.com).

**Free Workbook and Study Guide:** Print your own free *Well Done, Mom & Dad! Workbook* and free *HEALTHY Home Study Guide* at [timalba.com](http://timalba.com).

**Personal coaching/support:** If want someone to help you apply these principles in you and your family, please contact me at [timalbawd@gmail.com](mailto:timalbawd@gmail.com) or [timalba.com](http://timalba.com). No hidden agenda. Just a desire to help Christian family be found faithful.