

Resources by PJ Smyth

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INTRODUCTION ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE RELUCTANT READER

Sometimes when you buy a new computer you get a lengthy instruction book accompanied by a much shorter 'Quick Start' version for the people who just want to get it up and running as quickly as possible. This is the Quick Start instruction manual on parenting.

Here's the deal: I know that parents are amongst the busiest people in the world and often don't have the time or inclination to read a long book on parenting...and then they feel guilty about not loving their children enough to make time for reading a book that would make them better parents!

I also know that many books on parenting are much longer than they need to be. This is often because publishers insist on full-length books in order for the buyer to feel they are getting decent bang-for-buck, but this can result in rather long-winded books!

So, here is a short book containing only what Ashleigh and I feel are the really important bits of parenting children in their pre-teen years.

PART 1

A BIG VISION FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

A simple question with an unusual answer

Please stop reading for a moment and come up with one word that you would compare children to. Have you got it? I am going to go out on a limb here and guess that you didn't come up with 'arrows'. I mean, when you have to get out of bed at 2am to clean up our child's vomit, few of us would say, 'Oh, you little arrow!' But amazingly, this is one of the most powerful metaphors that the bible has for children. In Psalm 127 we learn that children in the hands of parents are like *arrows* in the hands of a warrior. Here are a few ways that children resemble arrows:

1. Children, like arrows, need to be carefully made

To turn a branch or plank into an arrow requires considerable time, care and skill. To fly straight the arrow must be straight. It must have a sharp point in order to pierce its target. The feathers need to be added and then the whole thing needs to be polished smooth. Here's the question: who is going to be the primary shaper of your kids? School friends? TV? Movies? Magazines? If you don't shape them someone else will. This short book is to help you up-skill in shaping these amazing arrows in your quiver.

2. Children, like arrows, are weapons of war

The image here is of arrows in the hands of a *warrior* not the hands of a target shooter. Our children are instruments of war. God will use them as swift, penetrative, offensive weapons to advance the gospel in the lives of many in the future, and unleash great damage on the kingdom of darkness.

3. Children, like arrows can go where we can't

The world distance record for archery is 1800m. Wow. Our children can go further into the future than we can. During the American presidential race that George W. Bush won to continue into his second term, the Harvard business journal cited States that voted for George Bush (Republican) as producing 12% more kids than States voting for John Kerry (Democrat). Their conclusion was that the future would belong to the Republicans! Since there happen to be more Christian Republicans than Democrats in the USA, the point is that Christians are having more babies in the USA than non-Christians. Good. The future belongs to us. Christians know that kids are a blessing and that if we are going to effect the future we need to be there...through our kids.

The Christian race is a relay race not an individual race. We win if we pass the baton onto the next generation. This is an exciting but grave responsibility, and as this verse reminds us it is not a foregone conclusion:

*Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten... After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, **another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.** Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt (Judges 2v8-12).*

Ouch. We have got to send as many believing children into the next generation as possible. We need to get a big vision for these little ones, and heed the words of Jesus in Matthew 18v10, '*See to it that you do not look down on one of these little ones...your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones be lost*' (Mt 18v10f).

PART 2

RED ALERT: BEWARE A CHILD-CENTRED HOME

The most common mistake of parents today

This phenomenon of a child-centred home is the most prevalent problem with parenting today...and most parents don't even know that they have it. It represents a philosophy of parenting that is subtly biased to the child rather than the parents, and it's seduction lies in that you think you are being good parents by putting little Jonny first rather than yourselves.

What does a child-centred home look like?

It is a home where the child is in control. 'Ridiculous' I hear you say. How can a three year old usurp the Dynamic Duo of Dad and Mum? Surprisingly easily.

Subtly at first, the child (even a baby) begins to set the tone, programme and pace of the home. It often begins in the psyche of the baby and parents with 'demand feeding' – the feeding philosophy that the baby should be fed whenever the baby thinks it is time to be fed. I am not going to take time now to get into a debate on the legitimacy of feeding philosophies of new born babies, other than to say that parents who go the route of demand feeding are usually more susceptible to developing a child-centred home. Demand feeding involves putting a philosophical stake in the home that says 'we will fit around the baby...rather than the other way around'. Let me quickly add that if 'demand feeding' is wisely administered then it can be fine, but the danger comes with allowing this philosophy to spread into other areas of home life.

Before you know it, your whole routine becomes a slave to little Jonny's feeding schedule, sleeping schedule, and then his moods, wants and desires. Instead of him joining your family, you have joined his. If he is a bit off form, then you decide not to go out in the evening, or go to church, and so on. By the age of two or three, this subtle pattern of 'I usually get my way' is engrained in the poor child.

I know that parents don't deliberately set out to ruin their kids, but continue on this course of action and you will raise a child who has not only cramped your lives as parents, but who is in for a terrible shock when he realises that the rest of the world are not as good as pandering to his every whim as were Dad and Mum.

I am not advocating insensitive, bullish parenting at all. We need to gently, lovingly and firmly disciple them into an other-centred world-view. The child

has joined your mission on earth and not the other way around. If he doesn't learn how to follow he will never learn to lead.

Paul instructed Titus to teach his men to raise children that are *not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient* (Titus 1v6). The word 'wild' translates from *asotia* meaning incorrigible or incurable. A child who has not been trained by his parents to show restraint and other-centered living, will soon become incorrigible when interrupting adult conversations, because when he decides he needs Mum to pay him attention then that is exactly what should happen! After all, I am the centre of the universe. Copernicus was wrong, the sun is the not hub of life...I am! Mum should immediately break off her conversation or activity with that adult and tune into my desires.

A child-centered child will show lack of restraint in crying and sulking and other manipulative behaviours, and the parents appease and capitulate rather than administering loving discipline. Here's another one: have you trained your child to play quietly in their room when they wake up, or once little Jonny is awake is the whole house awake? And going to sleep? You can't force sleep on another person (unless you use the dart gun), but you can train the child to stay in bed without crying and trying to climb out.

Dad's, let me take a moment to inject you with some godly testosterone. Never before has a generation of men been subject to such an emasculating attack as our generation. It is virtually impossible to turn on the TV or a movie without a father or husband being portrayed as anything other than a dead-beat dimwit, or a sexually perverted wife-beater. The rise of feminism tells us in shrill tones that 'anything we can do they can do better', so hey, we might just as well let them wear the pants and we can get older without ever really growing up. The average age of the Play Station addict is 32 years. Boys, it is time to grow up, and a major part of growing into a man is to take control of the home back from your three year old. If you are now thinking '*who does this jerk author think he is...I want to find his house and go sort him out*', then maybe I am getting through to you. You are beginning to sound like a man again. I am 37 and full of muscles and you could probably sort me out...but can you sort out your 2 year old? That's the question.

This book will teach you how to disciple, discipline and raise an obedient child so take courage. It really is possible!

PART 3

MANAGING A FAMILY WELL

*An elder must see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to **manage his own family**, how can he take care of God's church? (1 Tim 3v2-5)*

This word 'manage' translates from the word *proistamenos* meaning to lead. It combines the virtues of ruling with care, with authority and with gentleness. This short chapter is concerned with several aspects of managing and leading a family.

Being open to advice

How many of you readers took the high school course on parenting? How many of you took a College degree in parenting? How many of you have a parenting diploma on your wall? None. The way the world works is that we get parenting thrust upon us and we have to crack on with almost zero training. Sadly, no instruction manual arrives attached to the umbilical cord. We may imagine that parenting is pretty straight-forward, but Lord Rochester said, "Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children and no theories." The only way to do a really good job is to commit yourself to learning as much as you can as fast as you can. If you don't learn quick it will be too late because kids grow up fast. So humility in taking advice is imperative. Humbling but vital.

Abraham Lincoln once said, 'he knows enough who knows how to learn', and it is vital to allow other people to speak into your parenting styles. At my sons Sports Day last month, the track had a dotted line ten metres before the proper thick finish line, and some poor runners pulled up too early thinking that the first line was the finish line. Those of us in the stands had a much better perspective and could see things that the runners couldn't see...because we were not directly involved. It is often true that parents 'on the track' lack perspective that can be helpfully shared by friends and family 'in the stands'. For example, when Ben was two years old, my father-in-law asked Ashleigh and I if he could make a comment on our parenting. With a blend of intrigue and trepidation we agreed. He pointed out to us that we were being much more lenient on Ben than we were on Jack aged two, and that he felt we were not doing so well with Ben who was exhibiting incorrigibility and stubbornness. We thanked him, discarded our excuse about Ben having a different temperament to Jack (although he did), took it to heart and tightened things up. Within about three weeks Ben was a new kid. Since then, we have cultivated amongst our family, friends and church a culture of advice seeking

and giving. Obviously the giving of advice needs to be helpfully and respectfully done but the key thing is to seek out wisdom (Prov 8v12-17).

Charles Spurgeon said, *'Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely. What a blessing such an irritating critic will be to a wise man. What an intolerable nuisance to a fool.'*¹

Growing upbeat kids

We are trying to raise sparkly, optimistic, upbeat kids who expect the best. We do this by trying to be like that ourselves which of course rubs off on the kids, by always greeting them enthusiastically first thing in the morning and whenever we see them later in the day, and by training them to think and act positively. We have a special phrase that I say to them every morning as I wake them up which is 'It's gonna be a great day!'

Creating family pride

If you can create a sense of family pride, then this will make for an atmosphere around the home that is conducive to parenting. As our kids were younger we developed a routine that we did after each time of family devotions where we all put our hands on each others hands (you know...making a pile of hands) and then shout '1,2,3 our family is amazing' as we throw our hands up in the air. The tradition lives on even now they are older. Other ways to build family pride and spirit include developing family sayings, family jokes, doing trips and holidays that create family memories, laughing a lot, sticking up for each other and having a culture of encouragement rather than criticism.

Family Meals

Shoot for one meal per day together as a family. It doesn't have to be very long but long enough to eat the food politely, gratefully and to have some decent conversation. At most meals we go around asking the 'what was your best thing today' question and/or 'what was your worst thing today' question. These have been invaluable conversation starters for our family. We also have a rule that no one is allowed to answer any question with one word. For example, to the question 'how was school today' you are not allowed to answer 'fine'. To the question 'Jack, what did you do at school today?' he can't answer, 'nothing' (although when his end of year report arrives home I sometimes wonder if that is in fact the most truthful answer). You need to elaborate. This is good training for being able to hold conversations with people.

¹ David Roper in A Burden Shared. Grand Rapids.

PART 4

RAISING OBEDIENT CHILDREN

The biblical case for obedience

The primary command to children in scripture is to obey their parents. Take a look:

*An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and **disobedient** (Titus 1v6). He must manage his own family well and see that his children **obey** him with proper respect (1 Tim 3v4).*

*Jesus was **obedient** to his parents (Lk 2v51).*

*Children, **obey** your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Eph 6v1-3).*

*Warnings of **disobedience** in Deuteronomy 21v18-21 and Romans 1v28-3 are pretty hectic, including being stoned to death for disobeying your parents!*

A definition of obedience

Our family definition of obedience is found in this saying that all our kids know off by heart: *'I must obey straight-away, and with a good attitude'*. Obedience must be immediate and with a cheerful attitude. Delayed obedience is disobedience and obeying with a bad attitude is disobedience.

Eight ways to raise obedient children

1. Model it yourself to authority figures in your life

As with all aspects of discipleship, if you do not walk the talk then your training will be hollow and ultimately ineffective. It is incredibly powerful to model obedience to your children by allowing them to see you obey authority figures in your life in a cheerful and immediate fashion. Several times a year there is a clash between what my 'boss' is asking me to do and what my family and I would like to do. I always seize these opportunities to explain to my boys that 'I must obey my boss straight away and with a good attitude', and that although I would much rather spend Saturday morning with them, I must obey my 'boss' and rather go to that meeting. And Ashleigh my wife sometimes models something similar by saying to our boys something like, 'Guys, Dad has asked me to do this not that, and so I am obeying cheerfully and immediately, although I have to work quite hard to keep my face cheerful!' They love it and learn from it.

2. Be confident in your parental authority

God has set parents in place as the authority figures in the lives of children. With the anti-leader, child-centred, men-are-just-the-same-as-women, don't-you-dare-lay-a-finger-on-a-child culture that we live in, parents need to be confident that they are called and commissioned to lovingly but firmly train and disciple their children. Hebrews 12 speaks of how discipline is actually a privilege of being a son, a sign of true sonship. Don't fear that your child will resent your discipline, on the contrary they will soon realise that it is a sign of your love for them. A couple of years back Jack and some mates were throwing stones. I told them to stop but they didn't. So, I called Jack inside and disciplined him. He said, 'But Dad, why don't you also smack them?' I replied 'Because they are not my sons. You are.' It was a moving moment.

3. Leverage the amazing power of 'Yes Dad / Mum'

Here is a tip that we got from Gary Ezzo's *Growing Kids God's Way* course. When you tell your child to do something, train them to respond 'yes Dad /Mum' in response to what you have said. This has the following benefits:

1. Affirms that they have heard what you have said so there is no room for excuses along the lines of 'but Mum, I didn't hear you'.
2. Allows you to check their attitude through their tone of voice.
3. Helps kick-start them into immediate obedience.

This habit can be taught through Manners Mornings techniques (see Part 5), and then reinforced until it becomes a habit.

4. Never count to three

When little Jonny doesn't obey an instruction straight-way (I mean like one second later), then many parents move to the count-to-three routine, and even count slower and slower as they near the magic number of three. May I urge you to reconsider this ridiculous approach? The counting-to-three routine undermines your authority and places your child in the driving seat. You are training him that essentially obedience is a negotiation and he can determine the timing of his obedience. It is so much better to teach him that obedience includes the immediate factor. Delayed obedience is not pure obedience and allows the child to hold onto some rebellion. Don't go there.

I really want to stress the importance of demanding immediate obedience. When I say, 'Ben stop splashing Mum', if he does the tiniest little splash so much as a second later, then that is disobedience. And, without raising my voice I just say, 'Okay Ben, let's nip to the bathroom. Please grab the wooden spoon along the way.' I don't shout or re-explain, 'Hey, I said stop splashing and if you do it again I will smack you...blab bla bla'. He knows the rules. And remember, the fact that it was a little splash only a second after I said it is not the issue. Disobedience is.

Here's another example. We have this thing in the car that if things are getting a bit rowdy then either Ash or I will say, 'Okay guys, let's have a time of *no talking and no touching*, starting now!' (By the way, this is the most brilliant tip for family times in the car. It means the car goes quiet for as long as you like, and the kids gradually cool off and sanity is restored). If there is so much as a squeak once I have said that, then I pull the car over (even if we are later or on a highway) and smack the offending son.

You might be thinking, 'this guy is hectic' but I assure you that we have three spunky, upbeat, full-of-mischief-and-character sons who are remarkably obedient and secure. This has not come about by accident but by setting a high standard, then diligently enforcing it with no exceptions, and then once you have done this for a few weeks then the battle is mostly won. We go through blitz phases of discipline (usually when we have let things slip a bit), but then we go weeks without any smacking.

There are of course some prerequisites to this 'immediate' rule. If you don't specify a clear time frame, and if they haven't responded to your instruction with a 'yes Dad' then you cannot discipline them for not obeying immediately, because you cannot be sure that they understood or registered the instruction.

It is of course helpful and kind to give children warning that, for example, they will need to stop playing outside, or watching TV in five minutes 'because supper is in five minutes'. This helps them change gear and avoid the disappointment of having to leave the TV in the middle of a really exciting part. It is also good as they get a bit older to teach them how to 'appeal' a decision of yours in a polite and respectful way. More about this under Manners Mornings in Part 5.

5. 'Make your face cheerful. Your shoulders are not allowed to do that.'

The other aspect of obedience is to obey with a good attitude. Obedience with a bad attitude allows your child to hold onto some rebellion and doesn't constitute obedience at all. But usually little children need careful and specific instruction as to how to have a good attitude, because 'attitude' is an abstract concept that is tricky for little ones to understand. So, I suggest that you focus your training on the external signs of an inner attitude. For example, invariably children will drop their shoulders into a sulk position, or stamp feet, or make their face show displeasure, or even fall to the ground in a heap!

Rather than saying 'Sam, sort out your attitude', rather say 'Sam, make your face cheerful right now', or 'Sam, make your shoulders cheerful by lifting them back up'. Often his valiant attempt to do this is hysterical and it takes all my will power not to burst out laughing, but it has proven a helpful technique for our family.

6. Seize the small opportunities – like the salt shaker

The issue is always obedience, rather than the current issue at hand. For example, if you tell Jack not to throw the ball near the windows and he disobeys, whether the window gets broken or not is not the primary issue. Obedience is. All three of my sons learned their major lesson of obedience over the salt shaker at the table. In their high chairs, I would watch them reach for the salt, then as their hand touched it I would say firmly, 'Look at me. No!' But I would not move the salt away from them because this is a golden chance to teach them obedience. Then, ten seconds later they would try it again. This time I would say, 'Look at me. No!' and then as I said 'no' I would smack their chubby little hand just hard enough to sting them and shock them and provoke a few tears. But I would still not move the salt out of their reach. Then, predictably they would try it again resulting in a slightly harder smack. And so it would go on. Guess who won? I did. Every time with every son. The issue was never the salt shaker. It was obedience. And it is better to learn this lesson as young as possible when the stakes are low.

7. Do not exasperate your children (Eph 6v4)

Whilst the primary biblical command to children is to obey, to fathers it is not to exasperate your children (Ephesians 6v4). Avoid petty rules. Pick your battles. Be merciful and compassionate. When you are in the wrong say a sincere sorry to them. Also, make sure that you are giving them sufficient attention so that they are not compelled to rebel just to get some time and attention from you.

8. Use appropriate forms of discipline

Before plunging into the contentious issue of how to discipline, let me summarize that we discipline mostly for three D's:

- Disobedience
- Disrespect
- Destruction (of property...or your brother's nose)

Remember, to fail to discipline a child is to fail to disciple. Chastisement is the way that God intends that we learn most lessons when we are young. It would be great if children could simply learn through listening, watching and imitation, but reality is not like that. Most lessons early in life are learnt the hard way.

Discipline must be proportional to the offense: If it is not then you will find that you can exasperate or crush a growing a child. If they failed to turn off the TV when you told them to, then it is fitting to ban TV watching for a day or so. If they do not look after property, then withhold the use of that toy for a period. If you told him not to play with the knife, but he does and cuts himself and it is

painful, then that process of painful ‘natural’ consequence might make further discipline from you unnecessary.

Discipline must be proportional to the stage of life of the child: If it is not then you will find that you exasperate or crush a growing a child. For example, as Jack and Ben are getting older, it is important that their motivation to do good is increasingly internal (doing good because they believe that they should) rather than external motivation (such as a smack or consequence administered on them by me). The purpose of external discipline is to tutor their inner conscience until it gets strong enough to take over governing them. So, now that Jack and Ben are getting older I am appealing to their conscience more and reasoning more with them. If they still don’t get it, then I resort back to the external approach, but increasingly they are thoroughly repentant before we have even got to the bathroom for a smack. And, if I feel that is the case, then it is more powerful for me to allow them to say a sincere sorry to me, say a sorry-prayer to Jesus, have a cuddle with me whilst they stop crying, and the spoon stays on the window sill unused.

I am now smacking Jack very infrequently, but this is mostly because I was diligent in disciplining him when he was very young and so he is now very rarely disobedient, and has a finely tuned conscience for right and wrong.

The mode of discipline must be what will best help the child: Different parents have more ‘faith’ for forms of discipline than others, and different children respond differently to different forms of discipline. I acknowledge that and respect that. Sitting in the corner, time-out in your room, reduced pocket-money or TV time can all work in the right time and place. But I want to bite the bullet and spend my limited space recommending to you the form of discipline called smacking.

All about smacking

May I say at the outset that if the law of you country forbids this form of discipline, then I would recommend that you either fully obey the law, or move to another country where the government are not such a bunch of controlling sissies. But let me clearly state that, due to the potential dangers associated with inflicting physical pain on a child, I am only advocating a very selective and measured form of smacking. To let images of heavy-handed lashing into the mind is ridiculous. I am referring to ‘chastisement’ which means ‘to inflict pain with controlled force to amend an inner attitude’. It is done carefully, cautiously, and with minimum force and never in anger.

Why do we endorse smacking?

1. Because the bible does (Proverbs 10v13, 13v24, 22v15, 23v13-14, 29v15).
2. Because we have found it to be the quickest, kindest and most effective form of discipline on our three sons.

Attitude: Never smack in anger. Your attitude should be one of loving, firm parental authority. Be confident that this is a biblical concept and it works – it is not a ‘last resort if all else fails’. You are doing it *for* the child not *to* the child. It works best on young children so start young and do it consistently and diligently and you will find that you do not need to do it much as they get older.

Who: Dad is best. Mum can also do it if she is comfortable. Only entrust this responsibility to others (e.g. to a Head Teacher of a school) cautiously.

Where: Do it in a ‘neutral’ place such as the bathroom, rather than a bedroom. Also, do it in private to avoid any sense of humiliation.

When: As soon as possible after the offense was committed, although sometimes it is right for them to sweat it out until dad gets home.

With what: We use a wooden spoon. It is short and light and stings without doing much beyond that. We occasionally use our hands if a spoon is not around.

A suggested process

1. The offence is committed
2. In a level but serious voice say: *‘Let’s go and get the wooden spoon and go to the bathroom’*.
3. Once the door is closed, I sit on the edge of the bath and they stand in front of me. If they are old enough to dialogue, I ask them why they are getting a smack. Their answer usually reveals their current state of understanding and level of repentance. If they are too young, tell them why they are getting a smack. In our house, nine out of ten times it is an issue of disobedience. Remind them of the agreed standards e.g. *‘the bible says that children must obey their parents....in our family we do not....I must obey straight away and with a good attitude....your words were okay but your face was rude’*.
4. Then say ‘turn around and hold the basin with both hands’.
5. Then do a quick, firm smack. It should be hard enough to shock and provoke tears, but it should not cause bruising. I suggest that you leave on one layer of clothes to preserve dignity.
6. Do not tolerate wriggling or trying to cover bottoms with hands.

7. Immediately embrace and cuddle and affirm complete forgiveness, love and acceptance. Say things like, 'I love you Ben. You are usually such a obedient boy and I am proud of all the lessons that you are learning.'
8. Then, they must say sorry and explain again to you what they did wrong. Again, this will show you whether they are really sorry or not. Also, control the crying. No exaggerated or prolonged crying is allowed, and no sulking or bad attitude of any sort allowed.
9. Then, once they have cheered up a little, they need to go and say sorry to the other party if necessary. Listen to them do it. If it is not sincere, then go back to the bathroom and repeat the process until true repentance and submission is evident. It is vital that you win the early battle of the wills.

Benefits of smacking

The child receives an immediate and totally purged conscience. There is no ongoing guilt or shame. Teach them that they have paid for their sin and IT IS FINISHED! They will love you for this and seek out your presence once the discipline is finished because they will want to bask in the security that you have completely forgiven them and that your relationship with them is as it was before the offence. Their heart is free because they have paid for it. There are no prolonged consequences or drawn-out punishment. No wonder the bible recommends this as the best form of discipline!

How can I start smacking my kids if I have not done it before?

If they are old enough to understand then have a meeting to explain the new rules.

It really is worth the effort

Yes, training your children to be obedient is initially an effort, but it is well worth it. The joy of parenting increases dramatically when you have obedient children, and you are confident to leave your children with other people. And most importantly, your children learn the vital life-skill of obedience which will stand them in good stead at school and in the workplace.

PART 5

RAISING WELL MANNERED CHILDREN

The biblical case for good manners

Mankind seems to know intuitively that good manners are a good thing, and as our standard for life in all things, the bible endorses good manners. God clearly wants well mannered children that become well mannered adults. Take a look:

*An elder must be...a man whose children...are **not open to the charge of being wild** and disobedient...they obey him with **proper respect**. (Titus 1v6 and 1 Tim 3)*

*Rise in the presence of the aged, **show respect** for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD. (Lev 19v32)*

*Love is **not rude**. (1 Cor 13v5)*

From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up, you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead!" He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. (2 Kings 2v23-24)

When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat down at his right hand. (1 Kings 2v19)

What do good manners look like?

The expression of good manners will vary from culture to culture. For example, in most black African cultures it is a sign of respect to look down when speaking to an older person, whereas in most Western cultures it is a sign of respect to look that same person in the eye. I am writing this section from a Western viewpoint so please adjust as appropriate to your context.

Four ways to raise well mannered children

The first thing to understand is that good manners are solely an issue of training. Well mannered children do not happen by chance or good luck, nor is it a question of their personality type. It all hinges on whether the parents have the determination and skill to train their child in good manners. This is how you do it:

A. Set a high standard from the start so they think that is normal

As babies: After ‘Mummy’ and ‘Daddy’ (and maybe ‘McDonalds!’), the first words taught to our children should be please and thank you. Teach babies to express their desire for something like a biscuit by pointing and saying ‘please’ instead of just grunting or squealing. Don’t reward grunts and squeals. Then when they receive the biscuit they must say ‘thank you’. If they don’t, take it away and go through the process again.

As small children: Teach them that **‘shy means rude’**. How many times have you met a family and both parents say hello nicely, but the little kid looks at you sullenly and then either buries his face in Mum’s shoulder or disappears behind Dad’s legs. And then, wait for it, instead of apologizing to you and taking the child off around the corner to discipline, the parents say, “Oh, little Jonny is a bit shy!” As if that is an excuse!

May I warmly encourage you to make a deal as of now that *being shy is synonymous with being rude*. Good manners do not hinge on whether the child is in the mood to be well mannered, but on the fact that the parents have told the child that they will have good manners on every occasion. By justifying their lack of manners because they are ‘shy’, the parents are surrendering parental authority to the child and making the whim of the child the determining authority on *when and where and to whom* the child needs to have good manners. No. Come on parents. Teach your children that ‘shy means rude’ and then stick to it.

Along with ‘shy means rude’, the other thing that has worked so well for us is to teach our children from a very young age the following mantra: **‘Smyth boys have the best manners in the world’**. Whilst this is a statement of intent rather than reality, it serves as a standard for our family, and as a fun reminder that part of our family identity is that we are in hot pursuit of world-class manners. All three sons have known this phrase since the age of two, and now nearly ten years on they still know it - hardly surprising as I get them to say it about three times a week. So, when I drop them at school or at someone’s house, I will say, ‘Okay guys, have a great time and remember that us Smyth boys have the....(and then they finish the sentence). It is also a helpful phrase because in this age when poor manners are the norm, I do not want my boys to think that they can drop their standard down to that of their friends.

B. Differentiate between good manners and ‘being charming’

I suggest that you make good manners the expected norm that although you would encourage them in, they need to know that good manners is expected, ‘normal’ behaviour. Anything less than good manners is being rude and would warrant correction or even discipline.

But we have found that making a category ‘above’ good manners is motivational for the children as it gives them something to aim for that you can compliment and even reward them for. We call this level ‘being charming’. For example, saying ‘Hello, how are you?’ to a visitor at our house is just plain good manners. If they don’t do it they are being rude. It is the base level. It is the starting point. But, if they go beyond the ‘call of duty’ and say things like, ‘It is really nice to see you again’ or ‘welcome to our home; just tell me if you need anything’ then they have entered the realm of ‘being charming’ for which we would congratulate them once the visitors have left.

C. Do ‘Manners Mornings’ to equip them with the basics

I want to recommend an approach that has worked so well for us called ‘Manners Mornings’. These are short, fun, upbeat training sessions involving lots of role-play that we sometimes do on a Saturday morning for about half an hour. They set the standard and help get the various habits into our children. These can be done as regularly as necessary to teach new manners and reinforce previously taught manners. Remember, the aim is to give the child tools in the form of words and actions which they can use to display good manners. Keep these times light and fun and hopefully they will be full of laughs and applauding each other, but they are not ‘optional’ for your children and they have to follow your instructions and learn these habits. Exactly how you do these ‘Manners Mornings’ is up to you, but here are the activities that we have tended focus on:

Activity 1: Greeting People

Through role play teach them the following words and actions. For example, let Mum pretend to be the person that you are meeting on the street. Act it out properly by walking towards each other, stopping, greeting and so on. Change the roles around. Do one version for ‘good manners’ and another version for ‘being charming’. Be sure to applaud each other and add a sense of achievement and excitement.

Words: Hello. How are you? Fine thanks.

Actions: Smiley. Look at face. Nice and loud. Shake hands.

Charming: E.g. Nice to see you! Have you had a good day? How are things at work? Welcome to our home!

Activity 2: When people arrive at your house

Explain to them that whenever the doorbell rings, we all stop what we are doing (including turning the TV off or on silent) and come immediately to the front door ready to welcome the visitors. In terms of role play, one of you pretend to be the visitor, two others be watching TV, and actually act the whole thing out.

Activity 3: Answering the phone

Actions: Don't start speaking until the phone is properly at your ear.

Words: Hello. This is Sam speaking. How can I help you? ... Sure. Please hold on whilst I go and get my Mum. Or, 'I am sorry but she is out at the moment. Might you be able to phone back a bit later?'

Activity 4: Walking through doors

I think that it is good for children from the age of five onwards to allow adults to walk through doors ahead of them, and for all boys and men to allow girls and ladies to walk through doors ahead of them.

Role play: this is a great fun one to act out.

Actions: step to one side (before you walk through the door!)

Words: After you.

Activity 5: How to interrupt politely

This is a skill that we learned from Gary Ezzo. If a child needs to talk to you whilst you are talking to someone else, teach them to come up to you and quietly and simply place their hand on your arm or leg, and then patiently stand and wait in that position until you turn to them and say, 'Yes, Ben'. Teach them not to squeeze or pat your arm impatiently – they must stand respectfully until you turn to them.

Activity 6: Table manners

This is very much an age and culturally appropriate issue, but use the Manners Mornings role play techniques to train your children in table manners.

Activity 7: Asking without whining or sulking

Just as you have taught them that 'shy is rude', so also teach them that 'whining is rude' and 'sulking is rude' and are therefore completely forbidden. Teach them to ask once in a cheerful, clear and respectful manner. And then role play how they should respond when you say, 'Sure you can' i.e. with a simple 'thanks Mum', and also how to respond when you say 'no', which is more of a challenge! Teach them that when they hear the answer that they don't want, they need to do the following:

Actions: not allow their shoulders to drop into the sulk position; keep their face cheerful and not frown or cry; not allow their feet to stomp, and not to turn away from looking at the grown-up's face.

Words: teach them to say, 'Okay Mum. Thanks. I am a bit disappointed (it is always good to teach them to express their feelings), but I will obey cheerfully'.

Activity 8: How to politely appeal against one of your decisions or instructions

As they get older (maybe aged 6 onwards), teach them how to appeal if they think a decision is unfair. Here they would need to say in a cheerful and respectful way, 'Okay Dad, but is it possible for me to take a shot at changing your mind on this, or shall I just leave it?' or 'Mum, please could we come for supper in three minutes rather than now because this TV programme is at the most exciting part?'

Other Activities

You can add other activities as you like such as (a) how to offer your seat to an older person or to a girl / lady (b) offering to get someone a drink (c) making conversation.

D. Be diligent with on-the-hoof training

On-the-hoof refers to training a horse whilst it is actually running a race rather than in the training circle. Once the standard has been set in the Manners Mornings, you can now daily reinforce good manners, and correct and discipline for bad manners. If you work diligently at this then you will be amazed at how quickly good habits will be established in your children.

We often use the last few minutes in the car before arriving at school, church or someone's house to refresh memories on 'good manners' and 'charming', and even to role play how to behave when we arrive and meet people.

An important point: when your child doesn't do well in greeting people for example, do not leave it until later (or worst still ignore it altogether), rather politely excuse yourself and take your child off for a moment of correction, or discipline if necessary. Then return and allow them to do it again correctly. Once you have set the standard you must reinforce it. If you do this diligently for a number of weeks then the battle will be won for life.

It really is worth the effort!

Yes, training your children in good manners is initially an effort, but it is well worth it for two main reasons. Firstly, for the sake of your children. If you train them when they are young to respect others and have good manners, then this ability will serve them so well in their future years. People like kids with

good manners. Employers prefer employees with good manners. People who are charming get breaks in life that dull or surly people do not get. Secondly, it is worth it for your own sake as parents. There is little worse than either having to continually make excuses for your child's poor manners, or leaving your children with other people wondering if they are being well-behaved or not. Conversely, the joy of being proud of your children and confident in their ability to represent your family with good manners is absolutely wonderful.

PART 6

RAISING BELIEVING CHILDREN

The biblical case for raising believing children

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. (Prov 22v6)

An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, a man whose children believe... (Titus 1v6)

The tension is that the bible places the responsibility on the parents to raise believing children, but we also know from scripture that the nature of salvation is that the individual needs to respond himself direct to God rather than via his parents – God has no grand-children. Therefore, whilst our children are children, we need to be diligent in laying into our children godly habits and beliefs that will one day be fully owned by them as individuals before God. Here are five ways to do this:

1. Through your own example

Children spot a phoney a mile off. The most effective way to lay a love for God and his ways into your children is to have a constant, deep and visible love for God and his ways yourself. No short-cuts.

2. Through avoiding too-much-too-soon

Some parents, especially those who have become believers as adults, are often tempted to push their kids a bit hard. As parents we need to strike the balance of 'raising our children in the way of the Lord' (Prov 22v6), but also not forcing our beliefs on them. Up until the age of about eight you will find that your children positively respond to whatever spiritual direction you give them, but from eight onwards you will need special grace from God to lead them in godly ways and in a manner that excites them rather than exasperates them. Above all, have faith that God will win them to himself. He is at work in their lives. They are even more his children than they are yours – what a relief.

3. Through the family habit of church attendance

Attending church as a family is a non-negotiable, so make sure that you are part of a church that excites rather than exasperates your children. As your children hit their teenage years you need to gently but firmly stand your ground that 'going to church is something that we do together as a family'. But again, if you are making them go to a church that is not very relevant to them as teenagers then I suggest you change church fast.

4. Through the habit of family devotions

Family Devotions is what we call gathering our family for a few minutes of bible reading and prayer. We try to do it daily, but if not daily at least regularly. The trick is to keep it short, light, fun and to always leave them wanting more. The standard format that I use is as follows:

Bible: I read a verse or a short bible story. Sometimes I get the kids to act some of it out. Then I go round each person asking either ‘what was your best part?’ or ‘what can we learn from it?’ For example, if the verse is ‘Lord, set a guard on the door of my mouth’ (Ps 141v3), then I would ask what they think this means, and hopefully someone would say something along the lines of ‘to stop bad words coming out’. We might then quickly define ‘bad words’ (e.g. mean words, swearing, blasphemy, and rudeness). Then, I would say, ‘Okay guys, what kind of guard do you want God to put on your lips? This leads to army-talk of everything from Ninja’s to machine guns. Then we pray to ask God to put these guards on our mouths. The whole thing takes less than five minutes.

Prayer: It is good to train our children to pray different types of prayers. Here are some different types of prayers and ways of praying together as a family:

- A round of thank you prayers
- A round of please prayers (about what you’ve read or for other people or for the day ahead)
- A round for the person next to you (for their day ahead or for what you’ve read)
- Pop-corn prayers (this is praying in any order)

Don’t worry if family devotions are sometimes a bit distracted or giggly, just keep it snappy, light and fun. But, I insist on everyone praying at least a short a prayer. I think the shortest and grumpiest prayer ever prayed was by Ben who said, ‘Dear Lord, Amen’. Rather than getting all intense and lecturing him on irreverence, we all burst out laughing and the next day he was back to normal. Certainly teenagers require slightly different handling, but do not relinquish leadership of the home to a surly teenager, but neither get intense and exasperating regarding spiritual things as this is the fastest way to drive him away from God.

5. Through seizing spontaneous moments

Kids seem to ask meaningful questions about spiritual things at the most unusual moments in the most unusual places...and you need to be ready to capitalize on these moments. These are the moments when, prompted by the Holy Spirit, they are beginning to work things out in their own little heads and hearts. A little while ago a friend of ours died unexpectedly, and this prompted the ‘where will I go when I die’ question from our five year old, and the ‘why

didn't God heal him' question from our ten year old. It was inconvenient for me to engage with either question, but sensing that it was a God-given moment I changed my plans and settled into a great discussion with each of them.

This goes for other areas of life as well. For example, the other day Jack (aged 10) raised the topic of the 'Sperm Whale' at supper because he was doing a project on whales. Ben who is younger asked me what Jack was giggling about, so I seized the moment and explained the whole sperm, testicle, sex, and making babies thing to him all over again. But this time he was really attentive and 'got it'.

What should we teach them to believe?

The end of Hebrews 5 blending into Hebrews 6 records a plea to leave behind 'milk' that is appropriate for infants, and move onto maturity. The writer lists the following elementary or 'milk' truths that are a great place to start with kids:

- Becoming a Christian (being born again; repentance; faith)
- Water Baptism
- Spirit Baptism (laying on of hands; receiving the spirit; spiritual gifts)

Interestingly, this echoes Peter's 'big three' truths in Acts 2: *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2v38).*

At the risk of being Oprah-esque, may I refer you to my series of 'Get' Booklets available at www.godfirst.co.za. These deal with becoming a Christian, water baptism, Holy Spirit baptism, and other essential basics. They will help you quickly grasp the essentials of these foundational doctrines, and from there you can gradually teach the truths to your children in an age-appropriate way.

PART 7

SUPERDAD OR SUPERDUD?

Limp and vacant, men just aren't allowed to be men anymore

I got the following extracts from an article in a leading UK newspaper back in August 2008. The article was profiling the new book by top American Columnist Kathleen Parker called 'Save the Males'. The subtitle was 'Limp and vacant, men just aren't allowed to be men anymore'.

In the process of fashioning a more female-friendly world, we have created a culture that is hostile towards males, contemptuous of masculinity and cynical about the delightful differences that make men irresistible, especially when something goes bump in the night...

In popular culture, rarely is the man portrayed as wise, strong and noble. In film and music, men are variously portrayed as dolts, bullies, brutes, deadbeats, rapists, sexual predators, and wife-beaters. Even otherwise easy-going men in sitcoms are invariably cast as, at best, bumbling, dim-witted fools. One would assume from most depictions that the smart, decent man who cares about his family and pats the neighbour's dog is the exception rather than the rule...

Men have been domesticated to within an inch of their lives, attending Lamaze classes, counting contractions, bottling expressed milk for midnight feedings – I expect men to start lactating before I finish this sentence...

Something that is hard for many women to admit is that after the age of about seven, boys prefer the company of men. A woman could know the secret code to Aladins' cave and it would be less interesting to a boy than a man talking about dirt. From their mothers, boys basically want to hear variations on two phrases: 'I love you' and 'do you want those fried or scrambled?'

Seven year olds are no longer interested in making lanterns from coffee tins, They want to shoot bows and arrows, preferably at each other, chop wood and sink canoes, preferably whilst in them...

As long as men are disrespected by a culture that no longer values masculinity tied to honour; and as long as boys are bereft of strong fathers...we risk cultural suicide. In the coming years we will need men who are not confused about their responsibilities. We need boys who have acquired the virtues of honour, courage, valour and loyalty. We need women willing to let men be men – and boys be boys. And we need young men and women who will commit and marry and raise children in stable homes. Unprogressive though it sounds, the world in which we live requires no less....Then again, maybe I am completely wrong. Maybe males don't need saving and women are never happier or more liberated when dancing with a stripper pole. Maybe women should man the barricades

and men should warm the milk. Maybe men are not necessary and women can manage just fine without them. Maybe human nature has been nurtured into submission and males and females are completely interchangeable. But I don't think so. When women say, "No, honey, you stay in bed. I'll go see what that noise is" – I'll reconsider.

The buck stops here

One of the unique roles that God intends for fathers to play is that of leader in the home. In the home, without minimizing the unique and crucial role of motherhood, the buck stops with the man. President Truman had a sign on his desk in the Oval Office saying, 'The buck stops here'. Every father needs one of those on his dashboard as an expression of responsibility. When the first family in the Garden of Eden sinned, God came looking for Adam. He held Adam to account as the leader of the home. In Ephesians 6v4 Paul primarily addresses fathers on how to raise children, knowing that if the Dad 'gets it' then the home will be in order.

If we want to learn lessons of fatherhood, then who better to learn from than the perfect Father of Fathers? I want to draw a few lessons from Jesus' baptism about how the Heavenly Father fathered Jesus:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Lk 3v21)

1. He was a present father

He got to his kids baptism! He was present for this key event in his son's life! No amount of presents make up for presence. Kids spell love t-i-m-e. A successful attorney once said, 'the greatest gift I ever received was a small box from my Dad. Inside was a note saying, 'Son, this year I will give you 365 hours, an hour every day after dinner'. And my dad kept his promise and renewed it year after year. I am the result of his time.'

By way of contrast, listen to the woefully tale by T. DeWitt Talmadge: "Do you remember your father?" asked the judge sternly, "That father whom you have disgraced?" The prisoner answered: "I remember him perfectly. When I went to him for advice or companionship, he would look up from his book on the law of trusts, and say, "Run away, boy, I am busy." My father finished his book and here I am."

DL Moody said, "I believe the family was established long before the church, and my duty is to my family first". The Great Commission starts at home. Our families are our primary disciples. They need us. The more time we spend

with our wives and kids, the more they will want to be like us in knowing Jesus.

Men, use your leadership gifting to the maximum at home, not just at work or in the church. I suggest that time with your family is scheduled into your diary. Put in holidays, weekends and even family time each day. Make sure that you are up and leading your family in the mornings. If you get them off to an upbeat and happy start, even fitting in a few minutes of prayer together, then it will make a huge difference to their days and ultimately their lives.

Towards the end of his book *In pursuit of His glory*, R.T. Kendal writes a chapter entitled 'If I could turn the clock back'. It is a hauntingly honest chapter about the things that he wishes he had done differently. Lesson Two is 'I would spend more time with my wife and children'. He writes:

"Oh how I wish I could have a second chance to spend more time with our children. To read with them, to play with them, to tell stories to them. To be less harsh in discipline and to cry with them when they were hurting. I write these lines to emphasise this matter again with the hope of saving some younger person's family – or perhaps that of a church leader. If you read these lines, here is my recommendation:

- *Listen to them when they talk to you; they will never turn to you at a convenient time.*
- *Do not dismiss their feelings of being hurt over the way their friends or teachers treat them.*
- *Make the meals at the table last longer – and encourage them to talk.*
- *Don't leave them when they are afraid to go to sleep or need a bedtime story.*
- *Set time to be with them and keep your appointment as you would for the most important person on earth.*

What a great challenge to us, Dads. Let's make the changes and live the dream.

2. He was a tender father

God the father used tender words on his son calling him 'beloved', and he sent the Holy Spirit to Jesus in the form of a dove, a symbol of peace and tenderness. Tenderness means *strength under control*. It means being affectionate. Remember, children measure their Dad by putting a measuring tape around his heart, not his brain or his biceps. It means not shouting inappropriately. Someone once said that shouting to make your children obey you is like using the horn to steer your car, and you get about the same

results. Tenderness means being quick to comfort, and being persevering and patient with know-all or challenging kids.

Tender actions and tender words are an especially powerful combination. When I cuddle my boys I whisper age-appropriate things in their ears. Sam is now five, and I often say to him things like, 'Sam, I am so glad you are in our family. You are a brilliant family member and an amazing Smyth boy. And, you've got muscles like steel.'

3. He was an affirming father

God the father verbally expressed his unconditional love for his son Jesus. One of the main roles a father plays is to give his children identity and security. Fathers should affirm their children at every stage of life. Affirm them in their boyhood and girlhood, in their teens, and as men and women.

I make a point at each of my sons annual birthday parties of giving a one minute speech to the birthday boy. I do it in front of the friends and parents at the party and affirm and encourage him in his life. Then, I get Ashleigh and the other brothers to do a short speech also, even just a couple of sentences.

Here's the point: it is no good thinking it, you've got to say it. And like the Heavenly Father, whilst you can of course encourage and commend your kids for their good deeds, the power of true fatherly affirmation lies in that it affirms the child of the father's unconditional love. Think about it, Jesus had not done any fancy miracles yet, he had just lived an unknown, 'normal' life as a carpenter. And yet, his Heavenly Father was totally in love with him just because he was his son. We love our kids because they are our kids, not because they behave well. This leads us into the next point...

4. He loved his son with unconditional love

This is a very important one for fathers. We have got to speak out and live out and regularly reinforce to our children that we love them unconditionally, and nothing will ever change that. This will make them feel completely secure, and secure kids are obedient kids...certainly in the long run!

I have developed this phrase that my three boys know off by heart because we say it so often, especially when we are cuddling or wrestling before their bedtime. It goes like this:

I love you when you are good. I love you when you are naughty. I love you all time.

It is a phrase that they understand and love. Paul Lewis said, 'a father's words are like a thermostat that sets the temperature in the house', and these words will help create a really warm atmosphere. Why not try it on your kids? And

when they are naughty I affirm them with this phrase, usually right after I have disciplined them because they need to be reminded that failure is an event not a person.

How many fathers have you got?

This is a little question that I ask my sons. The answer that I have taught them to give is, 'I have two Dads. An earthly Dad and a heavenly Dad.' Then I ask, 'And what is your heavenly Dad like?' And they reply, 'Like you but better'. I reply, 'You got it!'

A father's role is to give his children identity, and there is nothing more important for them to know than that they are loved unconditionally by two fathers. And, the exciting (scary?!) reality is that they will learn a great deal about their heavenly father by watching us earthly Dads in action. We must be temperate, kind, loving, fair, and full of integrity. We must demonstrate through consistent life-style that God is first in our lives.

Inspire them with a sense of destiny for their lives

Tell your kids that they are special. Tell them that amidst the six billion people alive today, they are the only person with their fingerprints. Tell them that God has a role for them on earth that no one else can play.

When I was aged 20, I couldn't afford to get into a presentation given by the Australian entrepreneur and public speaker Peter J Daniels, but I managed to get hold of the recording and I listened to it again and again. What most caught my imagination was the part where, in his rough Aussie drawl, he told how he once decided to find out what it was that made the Great, great. So he read 1500 biographies and autobiographies, and found that the common denominator was that they all had *a strong sense of destiny*.

He told us of Thomas Cook on who's gravestone was written '*he left nothing unattempted*', of Orwell and Wilbur Wright who, whilst their Dad was preaching '*Man will never fly... 'tis only the realm of angels*', were in the barn out back building the first aeroplane. He told us of Columbus who discovered the New World...and did the whole thing on borrowed money. He told us of young Billy Graham out in the fields with his friends under the stars one night; as Billy lay face down in the wet grass praying earnestly, those closest to him could hear him say 'Oh God let me do something great for you. Let me do something great.' Ruth Graham, his wife, would later say that one of the things that attracted her to Billy was his sense of destiny.

He told us of young Winston Churchill who wrote his mother from the battle front in Sudan: '*I rode my pony into the enemy today and dispatched two of*

them. I turned my pony and rode into them again and dispatched two more. N'ere a bullet touched my person or tunic....I believe I was preserved for higher things.

Help your children get used to the idea that they have been created for high things. Impart a sense of destiny deep into their young hearts.

Inspire them with a sense of destiny for their future families

Another part of creating an atmosphere in the home conducive to happiness and obedience is to give your children a sense of destiny for their own families into the future. We often say to each of our sons things like 'your wife is going to be so lucky because you so kind (or 'cuddly' or 'strong')' or 'I can tell that you are going to be a great Dad...do you think that you will have sons or daughters?'

Kiss a lot in front of your kids

Dads, after teaching your kids about the unconditional love that God has for them and you have for them, the next most powerful thing that you can do to make them feel secure is to love your wife. Do not keep your love for your wife a secret from them. Kiss and cuddle her in front of your kids. Make a big thing of it every time you take her out on a date. Let them enjoy teasing you about your romantic advances on her. If they complain that I am taking Mum out 'again', then I say, 'Guys, I know you miss us but I love your Mum more than anything else in the world and need to take her out and spoil her.'

Another powerful display of this is when I get home from work; I usually give everyone a hug and then tell the kids to go out of the room for a few minutes whilst I 'catch up' with Mum. We call this 'couch time'. Then, once Ashleigh and I have had a ten minute catch up about our days, I give my attention to the kids.

Through doing these kind of things, I am teaching them how to romance their future wives, but more importantly I am assuring them that our marriage and home is secure. Gary Ezzo teaches that if your child is insecure, attention-seeking or disruptive especially in the night, then the first thing you need to do is to implement 'couch time' for two weeks, and make sure your child knows you are doing it, and that he cannot interrupt it. He will try to disrupt it like you can't believe but stick to you guns, and I bet that he will be a different kid after a couple of weeks.