

MAINTAINING MORALE

Dear Mr. Pearl,

I was one of those children who jumped ship, and I did so for all the reasons you listed. My parents were hypocrites and expected the same from my sister and me. Our family was the perfect Pharisee household, although we “prodigal daughters” tainted that appearance. We never missed a church service; we always helped in church ministry, always witnessed to our neighbors, and kept the Sabbath day holy (if you didn’t count the fighting or abuse that went on behind our closed doors.) Believe me, we had everyone fooled. When my sister jumped ship, I went back and told one of my mother’s friends the truth of what our family was really like. She didn’t believe me—I’m telling you, we hid the hypocrisy very well. We did not tell, mostly out of fear of more anger and abuse that would come if we let it be known. Pride kept us strong, not God.

I jumped ship for two reasons. The first was to escape home, and I figured I might as well give them something to condemn me for since they

were going to condemn me regardless of what I did. Also, part of me longed to know the good Shepherd and to lie down in green pastures. I had to jump ship because I was DETERMINED NEVER to become a Pharisee like my parents—I had to flee. My sister had no choice but to do as I did. Our parents still say it was our choice and they had nothing to do with it! They are so blinded by religion and are confident that they trained us right, but that, due to some fault in us, it did not work. Just this past week they were proclaiming that we will one day come around to their way of thinking.

I love living in the grace I have found in Christ! I love that my kids love me, that my husband and I love each other; I love that I am free to choose joy and hope every day.

I can attest to the fact that when children are not engaged as vital crew members on a glorious voyage, they do acquire a greater sin than “rebellion.” They become angry, bitter, resentful human beings who are beaten down, broken, and will lash out at all attempts to be loved. Like a runaway dog that was abused all the time, when you try to feed him, he will bite you because he was trained to expect evil.

Beka was right—it is all about love. You were right—it is all about joy. And where does that come from? It comes from knowing Jesus. I wish my parents could really know Him. God has used you to reach so many, for which I am grateful, and I look forward one day to know

that my kids know Him also.

AB

GOOD CHILDREN GROW OUR OF GOOD SOIL.

There it is! The primary reason children jump ship is because parents make the voyage miserable. Facing that fact is the first step to recovery. When they are trained right, they walk right. And, you should know by now that training is much more than words and warnings, more than principles and precepts. When the example is wrong, the words can never be right enough, for our attitude screams louder than our words.

Parenting is the most accurate test of one's true character. It reveals the fountainhead of all that lies within the parents' heart and soul and uncovers all that is hidden. Children reflect the soul of their parents; they manifest the heart that may have been formally concealed behind sophisticated screens and carefully crafted public perceptions. We parents can manipulate the public perceptions, leading others to believe we are something quite different from reality. But our children become windows to our true selves, often opening the windows wider than we would like and at times we do not expect. They find and expose the real you and tap into and follow that reality as their guide. They bypass our words and emulate our vital centers. If their mother has a "bad" day, all the children will have a bad day, and Dad will have a bad evening. Bad days make bad weeks and bad years, which eventually turn into bad lives.

It is impossible to become a good parent without experiencing a revival within. There can be no duplicity. Parenting is not like a job where you meticulously follow the procedures of your job description and then clock out, knowing that you have played your part well enough, even though your heart wasn't in it. You can't do the right thing as a parent without becom-

ing the right person. Your children are just too perceptive to be fooled by outward displays. When parents have a transformation within, good parenting comes naturally, without all the struggle and deliberation. Pure souls living pure lives don't need a great deal of knowledge about child training to raise good kids. Good children grow out of good soil.

America needs revival. The Christian church needs revival. The homeschool family needs revival. Most of all, parents need revival, because the children won't survive the Sodom in which we live without a revival that changes us from the inside out.

SO, WHAT CAN I DO?

Many people have written, some of them just a little bit irritated, saying, "OK, there is a problem; my own children are near to jumping ship, so tell us what to do. Give us some practical examples." They are missing the point. It is not about *doing*; it is about *being*. Get real. Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength until the joy of the Lord fills your cup to overflowing. Fall back in love with your spouse (that's the first fruit of revival!), and enjoy each other in front of the kids! Let the Holy Spirit create discipline in you so that you use your time wisely and have more time to be with your children. It is a matter of perspective—of where your heart is actually fixed.

Parenting is the most demanding job in the universe. The CEO of a mega company needs to excel in a limited number of areas only, but to be an effective parent requires expertise in many areas. And, more than any other job—more than being a pastor or missionary—it requires purity of soul.

Nearly everyone comes to parenting with a lot of counterproductive concepts. If God gave us a parenting test before

allowing us to have babies, few homes would have a swing set or a box of toys. Unfortunately, it almost seems that it is first necessary to become a parent in order to learn to be a parent, and you may learn too late to do your children any good. Most obstacles that limit children's potential are set in motion by the parents and are rooted in their own fears, ego needs, and inattentiveness. But parents are most often blinded by their ego and careless, unproductive habits.

Thankfully, we don't have to be perfect people, or even especially wise, to become good parents. We don't have to be thoroughly informed as to all the ins and outs of parenting as taught in books or by enrolling in parenting classes. We don't need schooling. We need to be real—consistently real—and caring. We need to be there, right in the midst of our children—in their face, if you will. Everything else will somehow fall into place when our hearts are right. A right heart can make up for a lot of wrong headedness, but great knowledge and understanding can never make up for indifference. Genuine love will cover a multitude of sins.

GREAT HOPE

There is great hope here. Think of it this way: To be a successful parent, you don't have to suddenly be all wise—to know what to do in the many varied situations; rather, by simply having a good heart and a proper attitude your children will respond positively to you, and love and respect fills in all the voids left by inexperience and ignorance.

You will get a much better response from your children when they perceive that you care more about them than you do about public perception. They are more perceptive than you give them credit for, and they always know your true heart—even when you don't want them to. Your children must

be conscious that you really want them to have great experiences. When they see you putting emotional energy into them, they will respond with cooperation and openness. They will be moved by your willingness to invest yourself in their lives. Think of yourself as raising up a manager for your own company—someone to take your place when you are absent, and to assume your position when you are gone and no longer part of the equation. Your children are your legacy, the only one that will endure in future generations. Working together toward common goals eliminates that adversarial relationship that poisons most families and sabotages every effort.

Sudden changes of heart with big efforts will not impress them. A lot of small gestures add up to big trust. You will create a climate of trust by never hurting them at “heart level”—but always demonstrating a caring spirit.

RESPECT AND DIGNITY

You say that you want to know what to DO? Respect your children. *Your respect of them grants you the dignity you feel you should have.* Respect is not just a perspective; it is a chain of events resulting from a chain of individual acts. Demonstrate your respect by allowing your teenagers to make a positive impact on the home and their younger siblings. You can especially demonstrate respect by listening to their ideas and treating them with the same seriousness you treat this article you are now reading. Talk to them, and then listen. Share your worldviews in a relaxed, non-instructive manner. Talk about your likes and define your weaknesses. Ask for help. Ask their opinion on something like how to resolve an interpersonal relationship in the church or at work. When you talk to them personally, and they can sense that their answers and opinions

count, they will follow suit. Talk and listen. You often have to listen to the irrelevant for a while before children will get down to the issues that are important. They will not just walk up and say, “I need your advice.” They test the waters to see if they are welcomed before they jump in with the big stuff. Listen. Always listen. The last thing many parents hear as their kids are going over the railing is, “You didn’t listen to me.” If you make excuses by telling me how hard you tried to parent them and how much you care, then I will have to join your teenager and say, “You didn’t listen to me, either.” It doesn’t matter what you think about how you performed. It doesn’t matter how you interpret your intentions. The reality you must work with is the one your teenager sees. What do they think? What have they said to you? That’s reality.

One of the problems with us parents is that we fail to adjust to the fast-growing changes in our children. They want recognition and respect before we realize it is important to them. One day they are simply childish, and the next day they are childish acting with an adult’s need for equal respect. When we shut them out of the adult world until they demonstrate that they are ready for it, they feel mistreated and misunderstood. In sports, it is like having to put them on the first string, starting the game in key positions, when you know that they’re not ready for it yet. But they want to play ball so badly, even if they are going to strike out or miss a fly ball. If you keep them on the bench until they are ready, they will join another team or go play another game—like a game of craps with some lowlife “team members” who don’t demand so much from them.

NEVER BELITTING

Never, never, never belittle their efforts or debase their per-

son. Some parents' leadership style is to demean, to cast their children in a role of unworthiness with the mistaken belief that it is the children's responsibility to prove *by their works* that they are indeed worthy. Thankfully, God doesn't deal with us that way, and you as their parents shouldn't either! Your role must change from warden to friend. Remember Jesus' words to His disciples: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). None of us perform well for those who do not believe in us. But we will kill ourselves trying to live up to the best expectations of those who believe we can do anything and whom we know will be tolerant of our mistakes.

Let me say it another way. If a child does a bad thing, or many bad things, don't fall for the lie that he is a bad child. If you talk to him as though he is bad in hopes that he will try to be good, you will achieve the opposite. Find a good thing in your child and speak of it. If you instill in him that he is your "good" boy, those good vibes will enable him to want to cultivate that feeling and will resist being a bad boy.

COMMAND AND (TOO MUCH) CONTROL

Some parents settle for too little, controlling only the outward behavior of their children but not equipping their souls. They are forceful in their discipline and do indeed train their younger children to obey at home and perform well in public, but fail to equip them with independent decision making skills and character. You can keep children in baby seats and later belt them into wheelchairs so they will not fall down and break

a limb, which will guarantee their safety, but it will not teach them to run with the ball and get back up after suffering the hard knocks that life will throw their way.

Children will not be content to be protected and guarded. If you squeeze too hard they will slip out of your grasp as sure as a wet bar of soap.

It is emotionally taxing on us parents to expose our children to the dangers of working as a crew member on life's ship. We want to protect and guard them against sudden waves and slippery decks, but they must be allowed to get their sea legs and learn the ropes of life, or they will not only be unprepared for life, they will be extremely unhappy as passengers.

Include your children in serious decisions, starting at around age two. Find ways to cause them to reason through problems with you. Discuss the issues, and then describe the ramifications of different scenarios. This is homeschooling—soul schooling. It is graduate-level preparation for life. Mama says to six-year-old Linda, “This article I am reading says that eating sugar causes yeast build up in the body.” Explain in simple terms the symptoms and consequences of yeast infections. “Do you think we ought to stop eating this cereal with the sugar in it?” You have already made up your mind, but you are going to include her in the decision making loop. When she decides that it is not wise, you will not have trouble taking her favorite cereal away from her. When the horrible stories you tell her and the example of the sick lady at church convinces her to lay off the sugar, you have led her to practice self denial, to make consequential and painful decisions. You are building character. This is respect. This is treating your child with dignity.

If you have never included your twelve-year-old in character decisions and you suddenly thrust options upon her, don't

be surprised if she brushes the responsibility aside and chooses the sugar. It will take time. Work your way up to serious sharing of responsibility in increments that the child can handle.

WORK

What can you do to keep your children happy on your ship? Teach them to work. The most miserable people are those with no responsibility. People are happiest when someone depends on them.

The secret to teaching children to work is to start them off on jobs that they will enjoy carrying out. If there is no such job for a particular child, then structure a job with other incentives—like fellowship (working *with* someone), or work of a shorter duration—that will make the work pleasant. On a ship, one of the first concerns of the captain is the morale of the crew. When optimism and hope runs high, the ship is prepared for any eventuality. Think about the difference it would make if you had eight initiative-takers instead of eight foot-draggers. Give attention to their morale. Never keep pushing if the family has lost its morale. Intimidation may cause fear and bring outward compliance, but it will never cause productivity or contentment.

Avoid slave labor. I tried to gauge the physical and emotional stamina of each child and to never push them beyond their level of tolerance. The thin line is to increase their threshold for the pain of work without making them feel like slaves. The pain of work is softened by working with someone in fellowship. Drudgery is diminished by doing a job that is challenging and creative. Work can be better endured when it produces a suitable reward. Work can be tolerated if it has a foreseeable end. Productive children are happy children.

PURPOSE

The family's morale will skyrocket when they clearly understand the purpose for their existence. Only then will they cooperate and accept the sacrifices of labor without bickering. I remember one time, not long after getting married, my father in law invited me to help him do some plumbing. The plumbing turned out to be uncovering a septic tank buried in hard ground. After I had picked and shoveled in the summer heat for about two hours and dug a hole about two feet deep, widening it several times, looking for the tank, he calmly suggested that I try digging ten feet further west. After digging another hour, he suggested that we mover over and try another test hole. Now, the fist hole was a miserable dig, but I bore it without complaint because I though it had a purpose that would soon be realized. However, when it became clear that he was using me in the place of a backhoe to prospect for a tank, the location of which he hadn't the foggiest idea, I lost all commitment to his "vision." Digging is always bad enough; digging without purpose or progress is unacceptable. I suddenly remembered an appointment I had elsewhere. I dropped my pick and told him to hire a backhoe. Aha! You might say, "I jumped ship." If it were my septic tank, I would have hired equipment to do that awful work. He wasn't digging. He was watching me and making suggestions. It was demeaning to have my time and energies valued in that manner. If, at that point, my father-in-law had possessed the power to make me keep working, he would have done so, and I would have "hated" him for it. He is eighty years old as I write this, and I think I will go and tell him one more time what a dumb idea that was. We laugh about it now, but it wasn't funny thirty five years ago in August.

I hope you haven't gotten lost in my personal story and missed the point. Kids will wear themselves out for you when

they can see and enjoy the success of their labors, but when you try to force slavery upon them they will file the chains off their ankles and jump ship.

BOREDOM

Boredom is the mother of invention, but if not addressed as an opportunity it can also be the “devil’s workshop” or the cauldron of emotional disturbance. When boredom drags on like an incessant winter rain, kids and parents will work up a good fight just to create a little excitement and flood the brain with a few endorphins. “It beats smelling your breath and looking at your ugly face.”

“Don’t touch me. Tell him not to touch me.”

“Get out of my room.”

“I had that chair first.”

“I think I will just lie down for a while. You kids, go watch a video.”

The captain of any ship knows to keep his deck hands busy at all times, allowing them just enough time to eat and sleep. They will clean and paint and repair and then do it again, for boredom eats morale like fungus eats wet wood.

Boredom is eliminated by commitment to a mission. To put it simply, when you have something to do that must be done, or that you want to do, you will never be attacked with the giant sloth of boredom.

People who are bored do not like themselves and they do not like others. They don’t like life. Bored kids are pouty, unhappy, self-condemning, ungrateful, and unlikable.

You can organize away boredom, in your own life as well as the kids. Design a creative agenda, hour by hour if need be. Obtain the tools of creativity—musical instruments, paints, color crayons and colored chalk, sewing, cooking, gardening,

construction, mechanics, animals (cows, horses, sheep, chickens, pigs), herbs, reading, and a thousand other things. Take every opportunity to learn and grow with your children. Don't impose your ideas of creativity on them. Just experiment until something takes with one of the kids, and then keep experimenting until all the children have been captured with some consuming interest. It is better to be interested in something frivolous than in nothing at all. If you have a girl who likes to collect baby doll clothes, become enthusiastic about it and stop by the yard sales and junk stores to help feed her interest and supply her collection. Kids will stay on a ship just to finish a project. If you love what they love, they will love you for it. One of the best things you can do for you kids is to feed their creativity.

ENTHUSIASM

The family should be constantly full of enthusiastic energy. Energy is more attitude than metabolism. Enthusiasm of ideas is a fountain of energy. If your mind is excited by ideas, your body will respond with strength to match. Most sickness grows out of the ooze of indifference to life. If you just let life happen to you, you will be like a can kicked down the sidewalk by a bored kid. Stop whining and assigning blame. Get up and construct life to your liking. If you as a parent feel like a kicked can in life, your kids will be kicked cans. Become a builder, a maker, a doer. God is a creator, and we, in his image, are creators as well. Your kids must be growing, or they will be going somewhere more interesting and challenging where they can grow.

Enthusiasm is a zest for life. It is unrelenting belief that you **are** going to be productive in some way. It is accepting the challenge and setting forth to conquer. Your kids need to

see your enthusiasm for life. It will rub off on them. Enthusiasm just feels good, and they will want to be a part of it. Get a project—no, ten projects—and try to do all of them at once. Some will never get done. Some will never even get started. But occasionally one of your harebrained ideas will become a monument to the cooperation and productivity of your family, and the kids will never forget it.

Dig up the crooked cobblestones in the old walkway, and re-lay them into a pleasing pattern with some new additions that are creative. It will take you and the kids about two weeks. Make sure that they are not your slave labor. Work together and let them do some of the creative work, even if it is not done as well as it otherwise could have been.

Re-stucco and repaint the swimming pool. Put up a new mailbox and let the kids paint and decorate it. Make curtains. Refinish the floor. You've got the idea. Enthusiasm and fun are synonymous.

RESPONSIBILITY

Children are not happy if they are not given increasing responsibility. When you give children responsibility you may be singing on for a dispensation of mediocrity. What two-year-old sweeps the floor and washes dishes perfectly? What ten-year-old boy paints the screen door like a pro? Children in a home are like loose bowling balls riding in the back of a pickup truck; you never start or stop any project or turn a corner without a few bumps, and maybe a little damage to the house.

It is difficult for us 'accomplished' adults, especially those who are controlled by the demon of perfectionism, to allow their children to participate in the finished product. We can do it so much better. Why would I label the desire to do every-

thing perfectly a demon? Because those who are given to this habit are known to place order first and other people second. Perfectionists are often depressed or angry when someone does not respect their need to “have a place for everything and to put everything in its place.” Perfectionists are selfish persons who should get themselves bronzed and stuck in a museum on a shelf with other figurines. They are no good in a house full of kids.

Any construction project generates a lot of noise, dust, clutter, and garbage. It is the cost of progress. The home is a construction site, a place where children are being molded into adults, and where adults are fitted for service.

The difference between a child and an adult is the ability to take full responsibility. A physically grown man who is not emotionally equipped to assume responsibility is a pathetic child in an adult body. It is our calling as parents to transition our children from irresponsible, selfish consumers to mature, responsible adults. It doesn't happen automatically, and there is a need in the soul of every child to become increasingly responsible. Those who are not made accountable in this regard tend toward self-loathing and despondency on the one hand and bullying and licentiousness on the other, depending on their degree of boldness and disregard for authority. Either way their lives will be bedded in discontentment, making them a ship jumping waiting to happen.

I have met several homeschooled boys—young men eighteen to thirty years old—who were useless as adults. It is like their bodies have been growing for years, but their brains were just recently implanted. They are innocent, pure in body and mind, but no one would think of them as being of good character, for they are as untested as a six week old puppy in a

Frisbee-catching contest. They stand around waiting on someone to tell them what to do. They are the first ones that you don't trust on the Internet. They grew up without being given responsibility.

Make your children responsible to oversee their younger siblings. I know that there is a ship jumping in the future when parents express shock that I should suggest that their ten-year-old should be allowed to discipline his six-year-old brother. When I see a sixteen-year-old who resists associating with her younger siblings, I know that her parents have not given her responsibility over them. She sees their wayward acts when Mother is occupied elsewhere, and she is frustrated with their non compliance. The younger children have learned that she is a paper tiger; she has eyes to see and mouth to complain, but she has no teeth. Mother even "protects" the younger children from her, treating her as if she were the problem. They have learned to abuse or misuse her in subtle ways, knowing that she will be sternly rebuked if she fights back. The sixteen-year-old can't wait to get out of the home and away from these "little brats."

When parents hear me say these things they object, "But my sixteen-year-old is not mature enough to "mother" her brothers and sisters; she is a problem child herself and part of the problem." As President Reagan once said, "There you go again." Many parents have heard my advice and gone home to inform their younger children that older sister is now their second Mama, and that they will have to obey her. She is even allowed to administer light spankings to the very young children—say, under five. She is allowed to deny the others certain privileges.

It is understood by all the children that the parents are still

the last court of appeal. The sixteen-year-old may make some wrong decisions along the way, but haven't we all? That is part of learning.

Many parents have come back to tell me that after placing their morose, rebellious teenager in charge of her younger siblings, she took her position of responsibility very seriously and rose to the occasion by trying to be fair and just and merciful in all her dealings with them. She showed maturity overnight. And within days, she was liking them and they were respecting her. An amazing side effect happened as well: Affection developed between them. Responsibility demands and produces the best in all of us. It is a magnet pulling us toward maturity.

Take time to sit down with your older kids and ask their opinion on training the younger kids. Listen to their comments. Respect their opinions. Be sure to let them know that you are not only going to use their good ideas, but that you want them to incorporate them into their own dealings with the younger children. And thank them for being a help to you. They will be among those who know how to swim before they hit the water.

We humans are by nature always in need of reaching higher, stretching just beyond our abilities. And we are not happy unless we're regularly doing so. Give your teens all the responsibility they can handle, and then step back and let them try. Define the parameters in which they are allowed to operate, and then set them free to experiment, including failing (without fear of punishment).

Trust is a powerful incentive. Create an atmosphere that allows a child who makes a mistake to admit to it and take responsibility without recrimination. He can then use his energies to improve his performance rather than falling into the self-defeating trap of excuse-making. Kids make excuses when

the consequences don't allow any way out. Provide a setting in which they can start fresh, and with experiences that will enable them not to make the same mistake again.

RESPECTING AUTHORITY

Authority is a fact of life. It is truly an innate characteristic of humanity. We were created to be under authority, free within the limits of the rule of law, but bound to observe that authority above us which represents justice and order. All legitimate authority comes from God, according to Romans chapter 13, even secular authority. Children learn to respect your authority when they see you respecting the authorities above you. Your disrespect of authority above breeds disrespect for your authority from below. Distain for authority in general springs from rank egotism.

There are times in history when the place of authority was usurped by evil men for evil purposes. At such times that “authority” was to be resisted, not out of a spirit of pride, but rather out of our allegiance to justice and respect for human dignity. Children must see your respect, even reverence, for authority, and if the need should arise to challenge authority, they should see your caution and reluctance to do so. Only then can you hope to be respected by them in the same degree. It is imperative that mothers do not undermine fathers' authority, and that younger children do not see their older siblings disregarding parents' authority. Likewise, if your children see you acting contrary to the authority you are under—church, employer, local law enforcement, etc., they will feel free to not support you when they disagree with your policies.

The reason for this general dissertation on authority should be obvious to the point of this book; there are times on your

family ship when the storms obscure the goals and all seems hopeless. When that happens it is respect for authority that keeps everybody on course until things calm down and morale can be restored. Kids have been known to suddenly jump ship and quickly suffer irreparable damage, only to admit a week later that they made a hasty and stupid mistake.

In addition, parents must live and conduct themselves in a manner that elicits respect for, and trust in, their authority. It is beyond all reason to demand that a growing child respect an authority that is not respectable. It is hard enough to keep them honoring the honorable, but to expect them to honor the repugnant and evil is a reach too far.

ELEVATING YOUR CHILDREN

There is a human tendency that is wrong-headed—achieving the opposite of what is intended. You have an employee that is not performing well, so rather than just telling him, you start picking at him, insinuating things, cutting him here and there. You are not as friendly to him as you are the others. You are more aloof, not joking or laughing with him. He is treated like he is guilty of something. You are hoping he will take the hint and do better. No, he will quit just to get out from under the condemnation. You probably justify your actions in that part of your mind where you respect your own sense of fair play by telling yourself that this pressure you are applying is designed to get him to work harder to be acceptable—to do what he ought, of course. But he will not perform better just to please you, or even to keep his job, for the heart is taken out of him by the atmosphere you have created. He hates the company, hates everything it stands for, and he will leave in a dark mist of rejection, never to be your friend under any cir-

cumstances. Forty years later, when your name is mentioned, or when he sees you old and bent over in a Wal-Mart store, he will hope you had a miserable life. Yes, his performance was unacceptable, but you did not treat him as a person. You actually divested him of the emotional energy that he would need to improve his performance. You broke his morale.

I can feel your pain, for I can feel my own, having treated people that way in the past. Are we stupid, or what? But the people we have hurt and rejected have gone their way. We are not likely to see them again, and we can forget, and hope that they can too. We also hope that we didn't matter enough to them to permanently scar them in any way.

My painful remarks have just been preparation for personal surgery. Get ready for the knife. Have you related to your child in a similar way? Have you shut her out, withheld yourself, criticized, letting her see your disapproval, hoping she would take the necessary steps to win your favor and earn your approval? I will say it again, having spoken and written it many times, "No one ever climbed out from under a pile of disapproval to win the favor of his or her accuser." You child will do just what the employee did: she will flee from your presence at the earliest opportunity. She will jump ship, even if there are sharks in the water. Better to be chewed up by sharks than to be chewed out every day.

You know when you are in the presence of someone dedicated to elevating you. And you also know when someone with a hidden agenda proceeds to tear you down, to humble you, to see you admit that you are wrong, and to make you try harder to win their approval. You naturally don't want to be around them. No doubt they think they are on a mission of righteousness, that they have a calling from God to hold up a higher standard, and you are their mission field. It stinks, doesn't it?

Your children may have the same reaction to the way you treat them. Think about it.

Instead of tearing your children down to make them submissive to your commands, build them up so you don't have to give them commands. Your job as a parent and the principal educator is to create a climate that enables them to unleash their potential. Given the right environment, you will be surprised at what they are capable of achieving.

Our constant drive should be to make them grow taller, to elevate them, not with flattering words, but with space to grow and the opportunity to fail and to try again without shame or embarrassment. When your children see you taking pleasure in helping them develop and grow, they will take pleasure in doing the same with their siblings and with others. When they feel you have been patient with their failures, they will be patient with yours. When your children are hard on you, know for a certainty that you have been hard on them.

STARTING OVER

Raise your kids as if your getting to heaven was based on their good works and good attitudes. How are you measuring up? Do you want to get down to the bitter root? Ask them, "What do you like most... least about the home? What would you change if you could?" The answer will give you a chance to reexamine your own policies and attitudes, as well as to provide an opportunity to instruct your children in ways that will give them fresh perspectives on your goals and your reasons. When you listen to your children, you will come to respect them more as people, and they will more willingly go along with your policies without grumbling, knowing that they have been heard and their views considered. They will greatly appreciate it when you find out what their goals are and then help

them to get there. Creativity and growth are infused into the family by providing information and clarifying it. Those who have it prosper. Those who don't stagnate. They have hopes and dreams and desire to understand why what they are doing is important, i.e., how it relates to the big picture. Optimism and pessimism are both contagious. When one member of the family gets one or the other, it tends to spread to all. God's intention is for parents to be the ones to exhibit optimism, because their children will see it as the hope they so desire for themselves in their future. Infecting your children with a spirit of optimism will pay many dividends in your and their future.

REPENT, OR WATCH YOUR CHILDREN PERISH

This writer understands that there is more preacher and prophet in him than therapist. I do not seek to make you feel good about yourself. My goal is not to encourage you, but to inform you of your failures and to call you to repentance before God. It would be gratifying if, in reading my remarks, you would learn at least one more helpful principle or technique and successfully apply it to your children's training. But if you would simply repent and become a disciple of the man from Nazareth, if you were filled with the Holy Spirit of God, you would always have One to teach you, and there would be a sudden and radical shift in your entire life—including your relationship to your children. There it is, nothing held back. I cannot do otherwise.