

INTRODUCTION

It's really fun being a parent. Last week we started this message entitled, "Insanity is Hereditary: You get it from your Kids." In this message, we'll pick up where we left off. The Bible says in Colossians 3:20-21: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

In the previous message I mentioned the novel, *Freaky Friday* that has been made into a movie. It's a story about a mother and a daughter who wake up one Friday and they have exchanged bodies. After a humorous day, they arrive at a better understanding of each other. Kids, if you could live in your parents' body for a day, you'd understand them better. And parents, if you could live in your kid's body, you'll understand *them* much better. As a review, let me remind you what every parent wishes their kids knew about them: (1) I'm not an expert, this is on-the-job-training. Most new parents are only a few years from being teenagers themselves, so they lack the necessary experience. (2) By learning to obey me now you can avoid some major pain in your future. Obedience to authority leads to positive consequences, but disobedience always produces negative consequences. Kids, by learning to obey your parents it will help you function in the academic realm, the workplace world, and may keep you out of jail. (3) When I say, "No" there's usually a better "yes" down the road. Parents usually say "No," because they want to prevent you from suffering. And (4) I'm not trying to tie you down, I'm trying to launch you out. Good parents are like a bow and kids are like the arrow. They are trying to point you at the right target before they release you into your future.

Let's talk to Moms and Dads. I came across a humorous list in my research called the "Top Ten Things You'll Never Hear a Dad Say":

10. Well, how 'bout that? I'm lost! Looks like we'll have to stop and ask directions.
9. You know, Princess, now that you're thirteen, you'll be ready for unchaperoned car dates.
8. I noticed that all your friends have a certain hostile attitude. I like that.
7. Here's a credit card and the key to my new car. GO CRAZY!!
6. What do you mean you wanna play football?? Figure skating's not good enough for you, son?
5. What do I want for Father's day? Ahh...don't worry about that. It's no big deal.
4. Your Mother and I are going away for the weekend. You might want to consider throwing a party.
3. Well, I don't know what's wrong with your car. Probably one of those doo-hickey thingies, ya know, that makes it run or something. Just have it towed to a mechanic and pay whatever he asks.
- 2: No son of mine is going to live under this roof without an earring. Now quit your bellyaching and let's go to the mall.

And the #1 thing you'll never hear a Dad say is: Whatdya wanna go and get a job for? I make plenty of money for you to spend. Here's \$100.

You kids may WISH your parents would say something like that. Nobody said it would be easy

being a mom or dad. God's instructions for parents in Colossians 3:21 contains a warning against making your children bitter and discouraging them.

So as we talk to parents today, let's consider:

2. WHAT EVERY KID WISHES THEIR PARENTS KNEW ABOUT THEM

Actually, parents used to know these things, because we were all kids at one time ourselves. But we've forgotten them. Another similar passage of scripture instruction parents is found in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master." (*The Message*)

It's interesting the command to parents is a negative warning: Don't make them bitter; don't exasperate them. If parents don't heed this warning, their children can grow up with problems. Children are like wet concrete and whatever you instill in them at a young age will be with them forever. Parents, one of the things kids notice is how you relate to your own parents. If you treat them with respect and honor them, then chances are your kids will honor you. But if you don't honor your own parents, it's hard for your kids to grow up and honor you. The philosopher John Locke once wrote: "Parents sometimes wonder why the streams are bitter when they themselves poisoned the fountain."

In preparing for this message I asked some of our older children, middle and high school students to email me with thoughts they wished their parents knew about them. I received dozens of emails, and I'll be sharing some of their comments. I won't reveal any names, in fact, I deleted the emails after I cut and pasted their comments. But if you're a parent with kids at home now, you might be asking yourself if your children were the ones who made some of these comments. Much of this message is going to be devoted to hearing the comments of these students. In a real sense, they composed this message. Based upon the information I received, I'd like to share five things children wished their parents knew about them.

1. Sometimes just listen to me without judging or trying to fix me

The #1 problem between parents and adolescents is a failure to communicate well. Parents, many of your children don't have a sense you're talking WITH them; they think you only talk TO them.

In an email, one student wrote about his parents: "Basically I can't talk to them because they don't understand me...and if I talk they just judge me!" Another student wrote: "When I talk about my friends I want you to care.

Here are some of the more common parental communication blunders:

(1) Exaggeration

This mistake can be seen in a statement like, "I've told you a million times to clean your room!" Your kids may not understand the use of hyperbole, so don't get angry when they respond by

saying something like, "Really? If it takes you five seconds to say the words, 'clean your room.' then for you to say it a million times would take two years of doing nothing but saying, 'clean your room.'" Your kids want to take you literally, so try to avoid exaggeration.

(2) Martyr complex

A statement in this category might be, "I do all this for you...and this is the thanks I get?" Have you noticed how parents try to cover up their mistakes by talking about how bad they had it when they were kids? "Why when I was your age, I'll have you know I had to walk to school, four miles each way, barefoot, in the driving snow, and it was uphill both ways...and I carried my younger brother on my back...and I went to a one-room school, and made straight As...and still worked full-time at the factory after school, making 35 cents an hour..." You kids just don't know how good you have it compared to us. Why you have the internet and your MP3 players so you can steal music. Why when I was a kid we had to steal music the old fashioned way. We had to walk into the record store and put a 45 record under our jacket, or we had to wait all day for the right song to play on the radio so we could tape it on our cassette player! You have it SO easy. Parents, you aren't doing anything for your kids by telling them how much better they have it than you had it.

(3) Comparison

For parents, put downs, name-calling and comparisons are the worst kinds of communication. One of the most damaging things you can do to your kids is compare them to others. A typical statement in this category would be: "Why can't you keep your room clean like your sister?" Each child is totally unique and special. Even identical twins are different. You will bruise their character by always comparing them to someone else.

(4) The prophecy

One of the most damaging things a parent can say to a child is to predict they are going to be a failure. An example of this mistake could sound this way, "You're lazy just like your mother/father...you'll never amount to any good." That kind of statement plants bitter seeds in the mind of a child and they often become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you tell a child long enough they will never succeed, then you shouldn't be surprised when they don't.

Parents, sometimes your kids just want you to just let them share the way they feel without being afraid they will be punished for what they say. They are hungry for this kind of interaction. One student emailed these words to me: "Just because I act okay, doesn't mean I always am...I might just need you to listen or I might just need you to hold me."

Parents, we need to work on become active listeners. LISTEN to what your kids are saying before you start trying to fix them like a leaky faucet. Richard Morris, a child psychiatrist wrote: "The greatest gift we can give another person is the purity of our attention."

Let me give you an example of really listening to your child. Let's say you have a daughter named Julie and she asks you, "Mommy do you love me?" You could say, "Of course, I do, now

go pick up your toys like I told you to." That mom isn't really listening, and she's actually teaching her child love is something that is earned. Instead consider this exchange. Julie says, "Mommy, do you love me?" Her mom stops and looks at her and says, "Yes, Julie, I love you. Why do you ask? Are you not certain of my love for you?" That mother is practicing active listening skills.

(2) I respond better to praise than to criticism

The best way to get your children to succeed is to fill their ears and minds with praise. Studies have shown it takes eight compliments to make up for one statement of criticism. Are you giving your kids eight times more praise than criticism?

To put it another way, you'll get better results from using sugar than vinegar with your kids. Try ASKING them to do chores rather than COMMANDING them to do them. One student emailed this comment to me: "I do not want to be told to clean my room or do my homework, but if you ask me I will do it no problem.

Kids realize they're going to make mistakes; you don't have to point them out. Another student wrote: "If and when I make mistakes, don't think of it as bad parenting. You can only expect me to make mistakes, but also expect me to learn from them."

One of the worst things you can do for your kids is to criticize them in front of their peers. One student wrote: "When you get on to me in front of people, that does more than discipline me, that makes me feel degraded and feel I've no dignity left." Another student wrote: "If all I see when I look in the mirror is how disappointed you feel in me, that's discouraging. I already feel bad enough about myself and my so-called friends reinforce it often. Hold the banner high for me. Don't raise the bar so high that I can never attain it, but challenge me and praise me to do better than last time."

You shouldn't just praise your kids for *what* they do, but also for *who* they are. If all you ever do is praise them for what they do, you may be setting them up for failure. For instance if most of what you say about your child to others is, "My child is on the honor roll." Or "My son is the starting linebacker." Or "My child is the faster swimmer on the team." What happens if they fail a test, or break a leg in football, or lose their interest in swimming? Instead, make sure you praise them of who they are. Look for good character qualities in them, and compliment them. For instance, tell them, "You are the most caring person I know." Or "You are a remarkably thoughtful child!" Those are statements of praise that will motivate them to be a better person, not just a better performer.

(3) When you "dis" (disrespect) my friends, I hear you criticizing me

This is especially true for teenagers. As kids are growing up, their parents are the most important people in the world to them. But when they enter the teenage years, a dramatic change occurs. For 12 years of their lives, you have been cool, and then suddenly, you are an imbecile. A natural part of growing up is to break away from parents and form bonds with friends. Kids wish their

parents could remember this is normal. If the parental ties are strong, the kids will come back and renew their bonds with their parents in their late teens and early twenties.

I can recall when my girls were small, I'd come home and they'd come running to the door squealing with glee saying, "Daddy's home! Goody!" And they'd both jump into my arms. But there was a time when they were in their teens when I thought they'd never want to hug me again—but they got over it.

Studies show during adolescence, teens actually feel closer to their friends than they do to their parents. Every parent wants their kids to have the "right" kind of friends, but they are going to choose their own friends. Criticizing their friends can actually backfire. Forbidding your kids to have certain friends will actually make them more loyal to them. Remember Romeo and Juliet? It's fair to tell your kids you object to the behavior of certain of their friends, but don't make it a personal attack.

I was bombarded with emails about students' friends. They had more to say about their friends than any other topic. Here are some of the email comments I received: "When you constantly say 'No, you can't do that,' it makes us want to do it that much more or if you say we can't date someone or hang out with someone, it makes us want to date him or hang out with that group of friends." Another wrote: "Just because one of my friends does something they are not given permission to do, doesn't mean I am doing it too."

One student wrote, "When I get busy and am never home, please understand that I want to be with my friends and be involved in everything because you're only in high school once in your life and that it actually causes me to miss my family because I'm not with them 24/7."

Lest you think parents only want their kids to avoid the wrong kinds of friends, that isn't always the case. One student wrote these amazing words: "I wish my parents knew how much they bring me down mentally. Ever since I started following God they have been hindering that relationship. They punish me by keeping me away from spiritual events and friends...WHICH IS MY ONLY JOY! I tried to tell my parents I loved God by talking about Him more but they ended up calling me self-righteous."

(4) When I act like I hate you, it may be that I'm not liking myself very much

Parents, do you remember how tough it was to be a teenager? I can remember actually worrying about whether there would be someone for me to sit with at the cafeteria at lunch; it wasn't just a minor concern, it was a full-blown fear I wouldn't have a "group" to sit with. And now, I laugh at that fear! But kids aren't laughing about it. Studies have shown a person's self-esteem is at its all-time lowest from ages 12 to 20. That's when we are most sensitive to other people's opinions of us.

In September, ABC Primetime ran a segment called "Cruel Intentions." It was all about how adolescent girls attack and demean each other. The message was "Mean Girls" is more than a teenage movie, it's actually happening. My generation had slam books, which were composition books in which students wrote anonymous nasty comments about other students. Today's

students engage in what the show called "cyber-bullying." Today, they use chat rooms, MySpace, webcams, and text messaging to demean and destroy each other. This easily erodes a child's self-esteem.

We tend to see ourselves the same way we think others see us—and act out that role. Someone summarized this perspective like this: I'm not who I think I am; and I'm not who you think I am; I am who I think you think I am.

In other words, the hostility students often demonstrate toward their parents arises from their struggle with their own low self-esteem. This is the most critical time for parents to make sure they don't embitter their children as it says in our scripture. Here are the email comments of some of our students. One wrote: "I wish that they knew that I struggle being myself sometimes around people and sometimes I put on a fake personality and struggle with hormones."

One message that rose to the top of these comments is that as tough as parenting is, most students told me their parents were doing a pretty good job. One wrote: "Even though I don't act it, my relationship with you is valued more over material things." One perceptive high school student observed: "I think most kids I know that come from stable homes—or at least have one stable or loving parent figure—wish they could tell their parents how much they appreciate that stability without sounding like a Disney movie or a greeting card—that is, manufactured and lame."

(5) I may act like I don't like rules, but I need some limits

The Amish culture received some tragic publicity this week because of the horrendous shooting in the schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. But before the tragedy, I already planned to introduce an interesting Amish tradition in the context of parenting. When an Amish child turns 16 they are released from all the strict rules and restrictions of the Amish culture. It's called *rumspringa*, which literally means, "running around." At this time Amish teens can dress like other American teens, drive cars, go to movies, eat pizza, and even go on unsupervised dates. This tradition is based on the belief they must test this kind of freedom before they can personally choose to be baptized and to enter the Amish life by their own choice. The amazing thing is the vast majority of the teenagers re-enter the Amish way of life.

Most parents assume that teens embrace the Outback Steakhouse motto: NO RULES. While many kids will act like they don't like rules, most of them agree they want to live within the boundaries. A student wrote me: "When I am deciding on how to speak or act, I think to myself, 'Would I disappoint my parents if they were here now?' I wish my parents knew that I would rather fail than cheat or compromise my morality." Another wrote: "I believe it IS harder to be a teen today than it was for my parents just because of all the peer pressure and parties and accessibility to drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, so I want my parents to know that I'm glad they ask me where I'm going and when I'll be home and wait up for me to get home...it keeps me from doing things I shouldn't because I know I'll have to answer to them at the end of the night."

So, thank you students for helping me remind parents what you wish they understood about you. I couldn't have shared this information without your input and insight.

CONCLUSION

What can parents do? There is a battle going on for the minds and hearts of your kids. This is not a time to retreat. This is not a time for passive parenting. You must be proactive in raising your kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You can read books on parenting. You can take seminars and courses on how to improve your parenting skills. For years our church has been offering a seminar called Growing Kids God's Way. Jon and Kitty Groth lead this important ministry and this semester, we have about 25 couples involved in learning how to be better parents. We have room for many more couples to receive this important training.

As I said last week, if you didn't have great parents, or you haven't been a great parent, remember you have a Heavenly Father who possesses a perfect love for you. He loves you so much He sent His only Son to die on a cross for your sins. If you will trust Him with your life, He can erase the mistakes of your past and give you a reason for living not only today—but a reason to live for all eternity!

And one final word to parents: Remember, moms and dads, your kids are going to learn a lot more from you by what they SEE you do than by what you ever SAY. *And they are watching us.* Even when we don't think they're watching, they are! One teen wrote these words: "When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang up my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one. When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals. When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite cake for me, and I knew that little things are special things. When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me goodnight, and I felt loved. When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to. When you thought I wasn't looking, I LOOKED and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."

OUTLINE

Last week: 1. WHAT EVERY PARENT WISHES THEIR KIDS KNEW ABOUT THEM

- (1) I'm not an expert, this is on-the-job-training
- (2) By learning to obey me now you can avoid some major pain in your future
- (3) When I say, "no" there's usually a better "yes" down the road
- (4) I'm not trying to tie you down; I'm trying to launch you out

2. WHAT EVERY KID WISHES THEIR PARENTS KNEW ABOUT THEM

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master." (Ephesians 6:4 *The Message*)

1. Sometimes just listen to me without judging or trying to fix me

Parental communication blunders:

- (1) Exaggeration
- (2) Martyr complex
- (3) Comparison
- (4) The prophecy

(2) I respond better to praise than to criticism

(3) When you disrespect my friends, I hear you criticizing me

(4) When I act like I hate you, it may be that I'm not liking myself very much

(5) I may act like I don't like rules, but I need some limits



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes