

### **Rules for Rearing Kids, Part III**

The issue I am dealing with in this installment of Pastor's Word is the hardest one for me. I am trying to navigate these unknown waters myself. I am referring to how to negotiate with grown children. Mrs. Pope and I have seen all four of our children walk the marriage aisle. Not only did we observe, but I was aiding and abetting by performing all four marriages! Although we are on the finishing side of rearing our children, I personally am still having a problem letting go. In this article I am not writing as an expert by any means; I am writing as a fellow traveler through this stage of the journey through life. Perhaps Solomon was wrestling with letting loose of grown children who had left the nest when he wrote these words: *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1,6,7). How do we allow our children to grow up?

#### **1. Leave a legacy.**

My parents and my wife's parents are not perfect people, but godly people. They did without many of life's luxuries and worldly entertainment to set an example to us how we should behave, grow up and live. I stand upon the shoulder of giants. When I witness of the saving faith of Christ or make a deliberate moral decision, I am reflecting the influence of my up-bringing. When I was a boy my dad, who enjoyed his tobacco, said, "I don't want my children to smoke; therefore I will not smoke again." We were the basic reason Dad stopped smoking. I would say it paid off; none of his kids use tobacco in any form.

As our kids were going through their formative stages, we conscientiously made decisions that would make deep, indelible impressions. For instance, in the matter of church attendance, we never wanted church to appear optional. When we were on family vacations we would always arrange our schedules, wherever we were, to attend church somewhere. What a joy to my heart when I was talking to one of my married children and they expressed a need to go and get ready for church on Wednesday evening, I said, "So you are going to church tonight?" In a surprised tone, the child replied, "Yes, Dad, we were trained to go to church in the mid-week." As the phone receiver was replaced there was a wonderful sense of accomplishment. That's the legacy we were hoping to leave. If we leave a legacy, let it be a godly one - one in which our kids see past our flaws and see somewhere in our life the life of Jesus. Jesus said, *"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you"* (John 13:15). *"...be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity"* (I Timothy 4:12). I believe that more is caught than taught. Many times our children will not just do what we say to do; they will often do what we do.

#### **2. Lay a path.**

John the Baptist said, *"...I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord...."* When the kids are growing up we may indeed feel like the voice of one in the wilderness, but we keep on doing the right thing anyway. I benefited greatly from Dr. James Rushing's admonition when he said, "You have to set your kid's sails while you have them." And if we look at venturing out in life as a sailor preparing for sea, the application fits. The sailor makes sure he has provisions, he checks the weather, and he checks the equipment to make sure his vessel is sea-worthy.

We made the decisions to go to their events like games and concerts because this is one of the few times I can publicly display my affection for them. It did not matter if my boy struck out or hit a

homer, Mom and I were in the stands cheering for them. If one of the girls had a concert, whether we could afford it or not, we were there to greet them after their performance with flowers, whether they had a solo or were supporting. We were there to support them. An even harder decision to make was to discipline them, even if it made them stand out among their peers. It is far better for a child to be embarrassed because he or she were “grounded” than for a child to grow up believing they can manipulate and tweak their lives around their parents and get away with doing wrong. We must convey to the child that the punishment is not worth the pleasure of the wrong-doing. If a kid can break curfews and other rules and never pay for it, a great disservice is ultimately being done to the kid.

### **3. Let go of the reigns.**

There comes a time in the life of the child, such as when they marry, that they are on their own. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”* (Genesis 2:21). There are mothers who still call their children in college while living a thousand miles away, every day to make sure their kids will get up in time for school. Where is this going to end? Sooner or later it must, or I should say, should. I have met full grown emotional and social cripples who are still living under the constant dominion and surveillance of their parents. Part of growing up is letting go!

This is hard, but it is the right thing to do. Sometimes our kids learn more by failing than for us always following them around with a safety net. They’ll walk much safer and securer with the knowledge that they are on their own. If they accrue a bill, they must pay it. If they make a mistake, they must fix it or live with it. If they do right, they need to know it was not just because their dad or mom made it happen. There will come a good sense of pride in knowing they made the right decision and now they are being rewarded for it.

### **4. Live your life.**

It eventually comes down to this. You have got to get on with your life. You and your spouse need to find your own joys now. The empty nest can become one of the most fruitful times of your lives. You will be able to get things done without the constant interruptions. You can work on perhaps a much needed intimacy between you and your spouse. I am convinced one of the great ways to show married children how to love is to model it in front of them. Let them see that you not only get along, but you enjoy one another’s company.

In the worse case scenario, if your kids (as of yet) are not living right, what are you going to do? It is not right to live in a state of mourning for your prodigals. Do what the father of the prodigal did - go on with life. The dad did not leave the house and stalk his wayward boy. He ran the business of the house and when the boy was seen coming home, the father ran to him, welcomed him and gave him a glorious homecoming. Keep the home fires burning and give your wayward child a home to come home to. Don’t turn your home into a morgue; keep the joy flowing as best you can. Always remember, God is your strength and source! It is idolatry to worship your children. Worship the Lord and stay faithful to Him. The kids are still watching and learning. Show them how grown people go on in the face of conflict.

Show them life goes on in the face of all circumstances. It may not be the prodigal situation; it may be health issues, financial reverse and personal dreams that have not yet been fulfilled. Remember what the Bible says, *“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10).

- Pastor Pope -

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