

HELP!

I'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE

TIPS FOR PARENTING IN 2020

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DAY ONE

Certain but Uncertain

This is fine. Everything is fine.

Have you found yourself saying this, maybe even jokingly, as you've attempted to navigate 2020? This has been a difficult season for many of us. Sure, it's had its high moments but it's also brought a lot of stress, insecurity and doubt. The unfortunate casualty in all the confusion can be our identity. It's not hard to lose sight of who we are as we watch any ounce of control seemingly slip through our fingertips. Ironically, in a time when our families have been home and together more than usual, we've felt a loss of control. Better put - we lost the idea that we ever truly had control.

Control the "Controllable"

I'm not sure about you, but I like control. So how have I been handling this situation where I have very little control? Not great, thanks for asking. You and I cannot control a global virus and how every decision maker will respond to it. So, what can we control?

We control how much news and from which news source we take in information. We control how much social media we choose to engage with. We control which direction we take in response to information.

"My encouragement to parents (and everyone) is to control what you can control and choose to trust that there is work being done behind the scenes. We may not understand that work - we may not even agree with that work at times - but God is at work."

"Be still, and know that I am God..." Psalm 46:10 The first two words of this require us to take a moment, putting all other things aside, and simply breathe. For some of us, that seems like a hard enough task as it is. When you find (ie: make) time for stillness, the next part of the sentence is what takes us to the next level; knowing (and trusting) He is God. To know He is God is to know all that encompasses His character as God: loving, just, aware, active, present, etc.

"What comes next may be out of our control, and uncertain, but knowing Who is in control and what He says about me can always be certain."

We can be certain that God goes before us - that He is with us - that He works things together for good - that He loves us unconditionally, and desires to call us His own. When we take little moments to be still and rest with these truths, we can be certain while there's uncertainty.

***STILLNESS IS A
PATHWAY TO PEACE.***

DAY TWO

Kill the Comparison

You are not Karen (unless, of course, you are). We're all guilty of it and we all know it's an issue that isn't good for us - We spend way too much time comparing ourselves to other people/parents. And sometimes, we allow what other parents and families are doing be the indicator of how we are doing. While I'm always up for some healthy competition, this ain't it.

I was having a conversation once, with another family, about how our kids are going to start learning a second language soon. Before I could even finish the sentence, a third party chimed in to let me know they thought we should have already been doing this. This ignited the original couple in the conversation to let me know about the "more complicated" language their child was already learning. Third party (inching closer by the second) began to imply two languages are not enough. Some point, soon after, I think I pretended to take a phone call.

There's no win in comparison

Reality Check: Someone will always be ahead, and someone will always be behind you. There will be plenty of opportunity to look side to side and either feel better or worse about yourself. This is no way to go through life, not a life living out its purpose, anyways.

Solomon is considered one of the wisest humans to ever live and he is quoted talking about the meaninglessness of envy for our neighbor. Its like "chasing the wind", he says. We'll never be satisfied if the goal is to catch up to someone else. That target is an ever-shifting one that is very dangerous for our well being and health.

**“For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder...”
James 3:16**

Okay, so we're on the same team that this isn't the "ideal" for how we're supposed to live. How do we get there?

Comparison-free Consistency is Built by Confidence in our Identity.

“Living free from comparison has a direct connection to where our eyes (and coincidentally our thoughts) are fixed.”

Shortly after discussing how God deeply cares about our needs, worries and anxieties, Paul writes that he has one final thing he wants the Philippians to do:

***“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”
Philippians 4:8***

**REMEMBER *WHO* YOU ARE
BY REMINDING YOURSELF
WHOSE YOU ARE.**

DAY THREE

Look | Listen | Learn

We all know there's plenty happening in our own hearts and homes to keep us busy, isn't there? Let's try not to miss it! We often do whatever it takes to advance ourselves at work or to acquire new skills. Chances are that the majority of our focus naturally drifts outside of our home. Even as people who want to love God and serve others well, if you're like me, 9 times out of 10 it's easier with people who aren't as close to us as our family. I believe Jesus' words here should be applicable first and foremost within our own home.

“...Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.”
Philippians 2:3-5

It's incredible what gifts attentiveness can bring us. When I was reading about Chadwick Boseman playing Jackie Robinson in “42,” I learned he would watch video after video of Jackie. He would study intently all the mannerisms and notice all the little things that made him who he was. We don't have to spend hours upon hours staring at our children to be able to pick up on little things they like or do not like doing. Take moments to really look. Look for their reactions. Look for where in the room they gravitate to more. Look for all the little things.

“When we start looking more, chances are we'll find more.”

The next step would be to listen. If you're able, pause what you're doing for just a minute and really listen. We've likely grown to learn that the words being said aren't always as important as how they are being said. We're listening to, not only what they are saying, but how they are communicating it. Sometimes, the very best listening happens by observing body language as our kids speak. There's a big difference between the same sentence being spoken with a hand on the hip and eyes rolled back vs. two feet planted and a gentle approach. But we're not listening to discipline, we're listening to learn.

As we learn things about our child, be creative in how you receive this information. Pull up your NOTES App and type a few thoughts in... Bring up what you observed in a conversation with your child (try not to embarrass them but humbly ask "why" questions)... Get out the camcorder (yes, I have one - be jealous), or, I suppose a phone will work and record fun moments. Take time at the end of the day to review little things you noticed about your child.

Ask:

- *What is my child interested in?*
- *What do he/she gravitate towards in our home?*
- *When they speak, what are they really saying?*
- *With what I observed, how do I believe they are really feeling?*
- *What can I do help them grow tomorrow?*

**OBSERVATION
OVER TIME BUILDS
UNDERSTANDING.**

DAY FOUR

Intention & Direction

Have you ever built anything before? If you have, you probably started with a picture (maybe even in your head) of what you wanted the end result to be. Then you made the all-important first step, to help get you to where you wanted to go. Our kids like building puzzles and the same rules can be applied; we have the end picture in front of us, and start looking for border pieces first, to begun building. That's not how everyone starts, but the people who don't start with the border are wrong. We still try to love them though.

Parent with a Picture in mind

Raising our children and leading our family requires our full attention to this concept. What do we want the end result to be? In our church circles we are quick to use the verse Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." When we see this verse at face value, or neglect the context of what the Bible communicates, we live this out as simply behavior modification. If I teach my kids the dos and do nots, they will do the right things and will not do the wrong things. Not to burst too many bubbles here, but..., POP!

At the heart of who God is, what the Bible communicates and what this verse demonstrates is that this is more about our child's heart than it is about getting them to say, "Excuse me" after they... well, you get it.

Preparing the child for the Path > Preparing the Path for the child

Jesus taught a lesson on building something that lasts in Matthew 7. I think it's important for us to look at, when thinking about the incredible privilege we have to care for, and cultivate our child's heart. He explains that it is wise to build a house on rock and not on sand. Storms will come (what's up, 2020!), but the house built on the rock will withstand the storms. Ask yourself a question, "Am I parenting from solid ground and encouraging my child to find solid ground?"

Our picture should not be one where our child goes through motions to say the right things, but one where our child is learning to make decisions that continuously build their lives on a solid foundation.

This summer, we were on the shore in northern Michigan, and my son kept yelling at the water to stop crashing into his creations he was making. It was hysterical (and yes, we helped him move away from the waves). Sometimes we get discouraged by the waves crashing into our families. Our goal as parents cannot be to always avoid the waves. Our picture should be one that helps our kids learn how to respond to the waves. Obviously, in our family, we've still got a lot of work to do. Maybe you can relate?

If we want our child to live, love, and look more like Jesus, there are a few things we need to do:

- 1. Model it in our own lives (more is caught than taught)***
- 2. Make it about the heart (who is more important than do)***
- 3. Maintain direction (think long-term results over temporary relief)***

1. MODEL IT IN YOUR OWN LIVES

2. MAKE IT ABOUT THE HEART

3. MAINTAIN DIRECTION

DAY FIVE

The Key is Transparency

I remember being on a road trip with my family a few years ago, and realizing we packed the diapers in a spot that weren't easy to access, the kids were done with their activity pages in -3 minutes somehow, and I had packed snacks for everyone but my wife and I. It was in that moment that the light bulb went off: This whole time I grew up thinking parents knew everything, but in reality... nobody has ever had a clue what they're doing! [My parents are great, by the way, but that sentence is still true] This game of parenthood is very much of a, figure-it-out-as-you-go kind of game, isn't it?

How many times have you wanted to respond to the question "Why can't I?" with, "Because daddy did that when he was a kid, and nearly broke both his legs?" Cross out the part about when he was a kid and pencil in last week. Transparency is a funny thing. Do we need to be open with our kids, YES! Do they need to know everything, NO! The reason our kids need a strong sense of transparency is because of the great philosophical phrase: Monkey see, monkey do.

What you need to know is this: more is CAUGHT than TAUGHT. This means, regardless of how amazing we believe our life-lessons are, our child (perhaps silently), cares more about how we live it out than how we communicate it to them. After that sentence, you might be thinking, "it's time to pack-up this whole parenting deal..." I've been there! But give yourself some grace. God does.

***"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."
2 Corinthians 12:9***

I'm not sure if you knew this, but, an imperfect person [you], raising an imperfect person [your child], is going to be... wait for it... imperfect! It's not perfection your child needs from you. Really, it's not. It's not perfection God needs (or wants) from you either. Really, it's not. It's authenticity. The more we stay aware of our need for God, the more our kids are aware of God's power at work in & through us.

Admit & Apologize

Some of the very best moments I've had as parent have come when I've asked one of children for forgiveness. That may sound a bit odd to you. But something that may be more of an outrageous statement, that will likely not be as strange to you, is that before I became a parent... I was the very best parent in the world. In my plans (haha, remember your plans?) of how parenting would go, I never pictured myself getting down on the ground, lower than my child, to ask them for forgiveness. In my plans, I was perfect.

When we are willing to admit to our children that we are wrong, we are breaking down more barriers than we can count. When we apologize to our children, we are shaping not only our own heart but theirs, to be one that takes responsibility and chooses humility. You might be surprised how God can use your journey to inform and encourage your child.

No, you don't have to (nor should you) confess every wrongdoing in your life to your 4 year old. However, a good habit to pick up would be one where we are able to look our 4 year old in the eye, acknowledge it was wrong to lose our temper, apologize if we made him/her feel unsafe in any way, and ask for he/she to forgive us.

1. Admit (humility in action)

2. Apologize (sincerity in action)

3. Ask for Forgiveness (responsibility in action)

1. ADMIT

2. APOLOGIZE

3. ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

DAY SIX

"I Need a Break"

The days are long but the years are short. I can't tell you how many times I have thought, or said, "I can't believe my children are already __ years old!" However, if you were to peak into our home on a Tuesday at 6:07pm, I would likely be looking at the clock and back at my wife trying to send a subliminal message that today is the day we change the time on the clocks, and put the kids into bed that moment. Parenting is beautiful, rewarding and a very great honor. It's also tiring, stressful and can even be identity-depleting.

You and I were not meant to run on empty, and we definitely were not meant to parent on empty. We need rest. We need breaks. *Google witty parent t-shirt ideas.* I love how the author (David) writes one of the most famous passages of the Bible, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul..." Psalm 23:1-2

When we work backwards in these verses, we see God wants to refresh our soul, God wants us to rest, and God wants to lead and provide.

Sounds like a pretty great option! But what does this look like? How am I supposed to lie down in green pastures in the middle of a global pandemic?

GO with Realistic | NO to Idealistic

It's easy to get caught up in the beautiful imagery of these verses, and the daydreams of being in some far-away place, but what if I told you that God can still refresh your soul inside your home, or even from your car? The truth is, this can be lived out in a variety of different ways - not just through date nights and getaways (both of those are very beneficial [more on that another time]). If your home is anything like ours, the only truly quiet time is before the kids wake up and after they go to bed. Ask yourself, "What am I currently doing with my time?" Often, we spend it getting more agitated by the things we see on a screen.

I'm not asking you to give up technology, but what if we split the difference with some of that time and chose not only to rest our body, but rest our soul? We don't think much about resting our soul. We don't think a lot about it because it's not very often someone on social media comments on our picture (that took 100 times more work to set up than it did to take [let's be real]) and says, "Hey, I was just wondering, how's the health of your soul?"

We may not be able to take a trip across the world, but we can take a few moments a day to read and think about God's goodness, mercy and love.

You know what we're pretty good at? We're pretty good at holding on just a little too long. Time, and time again, I see it happen, where people wait and wait, and when they're done waiting, they wait some more before communicating that they are overwhelmed. I, on the other hand, have never done this. (If you listen closely, you can hear everyone who is close to me laughing.) You and I need to communicate. We need to talk with our spouse, significant other, family, friends and even our kids when we need to recharge. The alternative is often manifested in a breaking point that makes us do or say things we regret.

I'm not telling you this is easy. I am telling you it's possible. Let those closest to you know when you need to take a drive or go for a walk. Let those closest to you know when you need help. Let those closest to you know you have boundaries. Realistic boundaries are not only healthy, they're necessary. It's easier to love well when you are spending time remembering you are well loved. You may be reading this as a parent, but you are a child of God first. And, Child of God, if I may, do not be shy about needing the God of the universe to refresh your soul.

***"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."
Hebrews 4:16***

**KNOW YOUR LIMITS *AND*
LET YOUR LIMITS BE KNOWN**

DAY SEVEN

The Long Game

So, you've had a bad day, you're taking one down, you sing a sad song just to turn... Wait a minute! Does anyone remember that gem of a song? How often is this our parenting mood after a day (or an hour)? It's so easy to get down on ourselves and pile the guilt on. The good news is that one bad day, in the grand scheme of things, can be redeemed with a new day. God does promise His mercies for us are new every. single. morning.

We've all had Pinterest fails, recipes that went south, or DIY projects that turned into other letters that are not as family friendly. We're going to have those moments constantly as we raise children. The beautiful thing, is that God can take those moments and use them for His purposes.

If we take the time to intentionally think about our child's life, the full scope of it, we realize how many little opportunities we have to continually help them along in their journey.

When we have the mindset of long-term goals, instead of short-term wins, we begin to give our parenting decisions a base to work from. It also provides wiggle room for grace to be present.

Some of you read that and think, "Buddy, I don't know what dinner looks like tonight... how I am supposed to think that far ahead?!" And it feels like we're constantly bombarded with the new way to get it right. You know that portion of what seems like every parenting book and article? Sometimes, it's not one chapter, but the whole premise of a book! There's always a new promise to unlock all the secrets of raising a family, and if you just listen perfectly to this specific line of thinking, you'll be a winner for sure.

Here's what I know - your family is not my family. And, we probably do things differently in our homes. I can't answer for you all the subtle nuances of what make your home function in the very best way. What I can tell you (and confidently may I add), is that it's not a sprint, and nothing easy happens overnight. We all want similar things for our kids: Love, protection, purpose, etc. Let's place value on them. Let's intentionally make strides forward in this direction.

Over time, our children will remember what our family values.
What we choose to place value in will be what they carry with them as they grow.

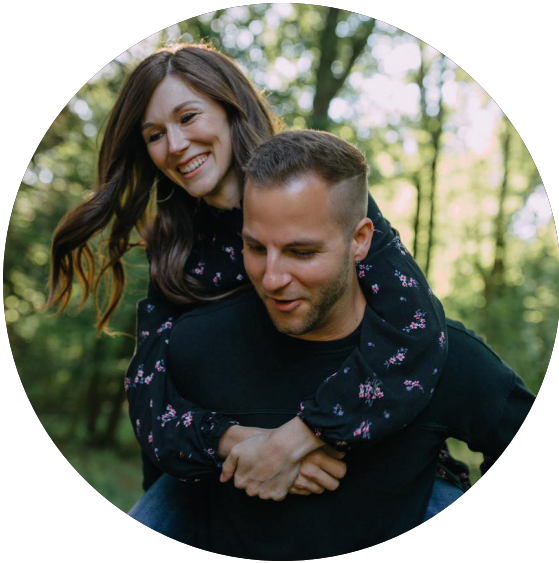
***"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."
Galatians 6:9***

Establish Family Direction - Who do we want to be?

Establish Family Strategy - What will help us get there?

Direction + Strategy = Family Values

**DIRECTION + STRATEGY =
FAMILY VALUES**



Meet the Author

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