

Parenting Communication—TIME.

By B. D. Tate

It is the fear of most parents that they will someday lose touch with their children. In some circles it is the “fall away” syndrome. Maybe at one time it was called the “Generation Gap.” We are all concerned as Christian parents that our children are going to rebel against us and/or God. Proverbs 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way they should go; and when they are old they shall not depart from it.*” For some parents the implication is that there must come a time when our children will depart from us. It is true that we are training our children to someday leave the home and marry or be on their own but there doesn’t have to come a time or day when they depart from us. Depart in that they become disillusioned with us our values, our faith, in order to seek their own.

This subject may seem a little premature for parents of toddlers, preschoolers, or elementary kids, but in my opinion it is not. The reason is because our communication with our children begins on day one. Whether we like it or not, we are always communicating with our young. What takes place when they are babies carries over into toddler hood, into childhood, and into adolescence.

What are we communicating to our little ones? Even when they are unable to understand what we are saying, they can feel, or sense what we are doing. Even when they don’t know what they are feeling, something inside communicates that it is good, or that it isn’t. Children can feel that they are loved and the apple of our eye long before they know what that means. They can also experience a sense of rejection, second place, a nuisance, in the way, of being one of life’s interruptions for their mom or dad, long before they understand it.

Don’t be fooled! If we say one thing and do another our children will catch it and someday figure it out. On the other hand, if we walk in integrity with them even before they know it, they’ll grab that one too. For example: The Bible says that God chose us; that God loved us even before the world was formed. The Bible tells us that God planned for our salvation before the foundations were established. It says that He died for us while we were yet sinners. Before we understood we were lost, before we comprehended what love did in laying down His life for us, **God was acting toward us as if we would someday figure it out.** There is something of great relief to know that God loved us before we loved Him. There is great relief in knowing that God chose us long before we chose Him. Children come to discover this same relief when they know we chose them and loved them first.

When our little ones discover that we invested in them, that we never lied to them that we never left them or put them aside; that they were the center of our hearts and homes; they were wanted and we acted like it, they will rest assured. They will rest assured because their needs were met.

Children have physical needs to be fed, to rest, to be changed, to be kept warm, to play, to be hugged, embraced, and held. They also have tied with these things emotional and spiritual needs. **There are no better persons on earth to meet these**

needs than mom and dad. God's plan from the beginning has always been marriage that leads to godly offspring. The family is God's idea long before there were jobs and careers; long before there were movies, TV's, schools, and churches. The core of society is one man and one woman in marital bond, having children. The family was meant to be that place of security, limits, training, love, and growth. Who loves greater than a mother and father? Who is invested more? Anyone else, for the most part, is like the hired hands Jesus describes in John 10: 11-13, *"Jesus the true Shepherd, the good shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep."* Parents are to be the good shepherds who will, protect, invest, and give their life for their own.

Giving our life for our own, this is a major theme of parenthood. Parents in a real sense own their own children as stewards of God; yet God's nature is to serve. Jesus said, *"I have come to serve, not be served."* Parents then serve their children by laying down their life for them. This doesn't mean we are doormats subject to their every whim. No, it means that we give of our time, of our energy, of our strength, to love, nurture and train them. Servant leadership means one who is going to go before them: Teaching them by example. We don't tell them to do something we would not do. In putting ourselves in their place, knowing what we know, what is the best for them, and what would we want done for us if we were them?

Dr. James Dobson spells love, "T-I-M-E." If we were our little ones what would we want? Most likely we would want attention from our mom and dad. We would want time. Time is something of great value. Time is something we can never get back. What we do with it, where we spend it, says more about what is important to us than anything else. Some argue that it is quality verse quantity time that counts, I disagree. **Quality time is birthed out of quantity time; there are no short cuts.** Children perceive, feel, sense what is important to us by the way we invest our life's time. The absentee father who is investing his time in a career in providing his family a "good life" may find the family he's providing for missing the "good life." Many children don't want the good life they want their daddy. Matt. 6:33, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."* A good father seeks first things first putting the relationship before things. For some fathers it is easier to go to work than be a "daddy" to their children. Relationships are more challenging, frustrating, and confusing, than bringing home a paycheck.

No one can do it all. We must choose where we are going to invest our time. Sometimes, most times, it means giving up something we don't have to have, to invest in something we really can't afford to lose. **Children are our greatest treasure.** Jesus said, *"Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also."* **We can't have it both ways as parents: living a life for our self and giving up our life for our young.** Motherhood is a life of sacrifice. Fatherhood is no different. I'm not saying that our days are one hundred percent devoted to Jr. but I am saying that our time should reflect investment with Jr. There have been studies that produced results that are absolutely astounding. One study for example sought to find out how much time do fathers actually spend with their little ones. Fathers would say roughly a half an hour a day interacting with their son or daughter while the test observations indicated that the average father

spends “20-30” seconds! That kind of time investment communicates to his children that dad has no interest.

Someone said to the mother of four fine grown sons, “I’d give up thirty years of my life to have sons like yours!” She responded, “And that’s what it took!”

Parents who invest in their children will reap the rewards down the road. Priorities in order will manifest in great peace, order, and stability latter on. Take the time with them now and when they are older they’ll take the time with us. Give to them, and they will give to us by natural love and response. The old song “**Cat’s in the cradle**” is about a son who says he’s “going to grow up to be just like you dad!” The father kept promising to be with his son but this excuse and that reason kept coming between them. When the father was older and the son grew up, the roles flip flopped and it was the father who wanted time and the son made excuses and reasons. He did grow up to be just like dad.

Quality time comes from spending time together. Quality time comes when our child decides to respond to our love. It comes when our child knows that mom and dad are always going to be there, thick and thin, in and out season. Quality time comes when our child knows the security of our love and shares with us their inner most thoughts and feelings. Quality time comes when as parents we are readily available and they seek us out to spend time with us, to bring their hearts concerns and cares to us. **None of these things can be orchestrated, manipulated or rushed.** These and other quality moments of trust and love spawn out of quantity time invested. We build a foundation one step, one brick, and one moment at a time. Quantity time means: I see you as the most important priority in my life; more important than my job; more important than the TV; more important than having things...

We learned that each of our kids had different moments when they were ready to talk. We couldn’t just sit them down and start having a meaningful conversation; no it happened when they were ready. For one it might happen in the car driving home after practice or school, when the radio was turned off. For another it might happen after or near mid-night when everyone else was in bed. These moments are precious and to be guarded prayed and waited for. These are the moments when true heart connections take place this is the quality time.

Quantity time is what instills security and self esteem--not quality time. Children know they are important because mom and dad act like it. It is the security and self esteem that provides the opportunity, safety, for our kids to enter into quality time with us.

Valerie stayed home during the eighties. It was a time when business opportunities abounded especially for women in management. It was a time when it was not popular to stay home. Today there is a growing movement for moms to stay home with their babies--thank God. Let me tell you it was not easy for her. Women of her age were being promoted beyond the men their age. Women were leaving the home and making money. Day-care was booming. She of course was not the only one who believed being home was where God wanted her--it just felt like it. During the eighties there were a lot of pulls and pushes to get out of the home. Not to mention the ridicule, the sarcasms, and disrespect given to the “homemaker.” There were times of depression for her as she struggled with her own identity. There were times when she wanted desperately to find a job, went out on interviews only to ultimately turn them

down. She had her bad days and good ones. **The hardest part was the difficulty of seeing whether or not her sacrifice was worth it.** How does she measure the rewards? How does she know that it is worth it? Certainly the world around her made it nearly impossible to see it. There were many sessions of trying to keep before her the “vision” and purpose of being home with the kids. It was her conviction, her belief, her own conscience that made her the mother she was and is. And I will tell you that my children will never be more blessed in their life than when as little ones she stayed home with them. She was their teacher, trainer, strength, standby, helper, planner, sponsor, entertainment director, scheduler, play maker, social director, spiritual advisor, someone who never left them nor forsook them. They knew mommy was always there--there is no greater stability for a child. **But mommy’s investment didn’t come without price.** She gave up other things, other opportunities, other positions, even the esteem of friends sometimes to do it. One of the Ten Commandments is: Honor thy Father and thy Mother. It seems that God esteems parents more than employees otherwise the commandment would have said, “Honor thy employer and thy boss.”

Someday her children are going to come to her, one at a time, when they realize what she did for them and under what circumstances she did them. They will be adults one day and face decisions about their own children and a light will turn on in their head what mommy did. They are going to pick up the phone, or drive over in the car, and say thank you mom for loving me more than these. **They are going to realize that before they understood, mommy was there for them.** They are going to understand that she laid down her life as the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Make no mistake about it our lives on this earth are being tried and tested as to what matters most to us over against what matters most to God. Who will we serve?

This is all well and good. Mothers, fathers, lay down your life for your children. It is easier said than done. There needs to be some direction, some specifics, to help understand exactly what that means. Laying down ones life, just doing it, may not result in the outcome desired. There needs to be some purpose in that effort, like realizing that our parent-servant role doesn’t mean being a doormat.

KEYS THAT HELPED US:

1) The quantity of time Valerie spent with each child helped her develop **a sixth sense about their intentions, motives, or what was in their heart.** She knew them. She operates in a mercy motive anyway, but she knew them so well that when things happened she could figure out what they were up to.

Story: I had come home from work and was tired and a little cranky. I went up stairs to lay down for a little bit only to discover our bedroom all messed up with cotton balls everywhere! Ryan had been here. I called him upstairs and blasted him for messing up the room (Good Dad). She came upstairs and when I was done she began to ask Ryan what he was about. She discovered that Ryan was pretending to feed the ducks! I’ll never forget it, my guilt, and my overreaction. I apologized to Ryan; however, if Valerie hadn’t known Ryan so well she wouldn’t have taken the time to find out.

Children who grow up being misunderstood will eventually stop trying to be understood. Many a kid laments, “My parents just don’t understand me!” We won’t if we don’t invest the time while they are young and willing to be understood.

2) **When wrong about something with our children apologize for it.** Parents

who are wrong should say so--our practicing repentance helps them to do so. If we publicly chastise our children for something we think they did and come to find out they didn't; I believe strongly that we should publicly apologize to them. When in college my football coach would publicly chastise us and even humiliate us. When he was wrong though, he would wait to apologize in private. Some would say, "Well at least he did apologize." But there was always this residue of resentment for having been humiliated publicly that was never acknowledged. Communication is best when residue, interference, is cleaned up. More importantly they see a dad or mom who is willing to admit they are wrong--**that builds trust.**

3) **Communication takes place indirectly as much or more than directly.** In taking care of our little ones on an every day basis with the mundane repetitions of fixing them something to eat, getting them a drink, changing their diaper, reading them a story again or the fourth time, just sitting with them, being in the same room, **such things build bonds.**

Story: When I had to put Holly on the bus for Kindergarten the last half of the year when Valerie took a part time job. Something took place between Holly and I. Daddy was taking care of her not so important every day needs. I was making sure she brushed her teeth, fixed pony tales, getting the snack together for school, making sure she didn't miss the bus, watching the same favorite kiddy show on TV (My Little Pony--I can still sing the theme song!) with her. These things mean volumes and make our relationship stable and strong. It really is a privilege to take care of them; and they know (they catch), that we think they are important.

4) **Personal and individual time with each child is vital.** This is the time when the emotional tank within them gets filled. Our children need our attention, undivided attention. They need for us to take the time and look them straight in the eyes and fill up what's inside. Eye contact is very important. It's as if unseen energy of love flows from our heart's to theirs through the eyes. This love fills up a tank that gets periodically empty. Our children will indicate an empty tank when they become whinny, fussy, loud, grasping for attention--rowdy! Another **vital sign** is that they are not listening to us. If we don't stop our world and fill this emotional tank they will eventually stop asking. **When they stop asking we have lost them!** There are many teachers who can thank the pupil's parents for filling this tank before sending hem to school. There is a real sense that we can be in the same room with them and not fill this tank. We can think we are spending time with them but the hose isn't connected. Turn off the TV, put down the paper, pick up the kid and look them in the eyes and spend five, ten, solid minutes pouring love into them! It is amazing they will on their own accord know their tank is full and be ready to go off and play contentedly. This is true not just for little ones but for big ones too.

We have four kids. Sometimes they got rowdy. Sometimes they would fight and fuss with each other. It's time to take inventory. Who haven't we spent time with? Who haven't we done a project with? Who haven't we done homework with? Who haven't we spent some time talking with about their day? **As some would say date our own kids find things that we enjoy with them.**

5) **Find things that we can enjoy with them.** This is an important area of connection. It is not up to the kids to make this happen it is a parent's job. For the parent who likes sports and their son or daughter does too, this can be relatively easy.

The only danger in this situation is over stepping and beginning to “live” through our kids. This may manifest in overly aggressive encouragement to do better, parents becoming obnoxious from the stands, or too critical of their performances. The communication becomes tangled with approved or disapproved behavior. A child’s identity becomes wrapped up in their success or failure on the field. **What about a parent who has a child that is very different in nature, attributes, and interests?** This makes the task harder and all the more important. By investing ourselves in our child’s world of interest we are validating them. We are saying that our differences are gifts, good things, and awesome instead of some kind of freakish accident. We need to cross over the different interests and be there for them.

For example: for my oldest son we enjoyed golf together; however, my second son had no interest (imagine that!). His interests were dancing especially “break dancing.” I have to tell you at first I had no desire to enter his world over break dancing. But a strange and wonderful thing happened as I made myself watch, listen and learn about break dancing—he would come and ask me to watch video with him. I learned that my second son had desires, interests, and a work ethic that matched mine! He studied, he read, he researched, and he practiced relentlessly. I watched as his skill progress over months and years from very basic to quite advance. In fact, he became one of the best break dancers around. I encouraged him, I praised his work ethic, and I meant it. We connected over something I had no interest in doing. I remember talking to my son over the phone long distance from Florida where he was going to college. His roommate and he had gone break dancing. My son was talking to me about it over the phone. His roommate was shocked that I actually knew anything about it, could understand the moves, and could converse on the subject. His roommate said, “That’s very cool!” I share this not to promote myself but to explain the importance of entering their world, whether or not it is interesting to us. I think my son told me about his roommate because he was grateful for a father who did enter his world.

6) A No-Knock Policy. We don’t believe in letting our kids call each other names any more than we would call them names. We try to practice the adage, “love the sinner, not the sin.” This means we may not like what they did, or said, or an attitude, but we don’t attack them personally. Name calling, joking put-downs, embarrassing exposures, critical statements intended to hurt, are off limits. “Idiot,” “Jerk,” or ‘Stupid’ are some of the favorites. Kids left to themselves will by natural instinct due to their sin nature, begin to lash out with such things. We all do it. That’s why the statement of a child to his mommy is so funny, “Mommy, why is it that the “jerks,” only come out when daddy is driving?” We have also reprimanded our children when they say, “I hate you!” Buzz! That is not allowed. They may say they hate what was said or done, but not the person. I believe sibling rivalry is curtailed when we establish rules like this and enforced them with parental example. Our children must know that their behavior is monitored, they way they treat each other is censored, and that there is fair and equitable solutions to violations. They need to know that their home environment is safe, predictable, and consistent. Their personhood will not be assaulted physically, emotionally, mentally, or even spiritually.

7) Treat them as equals and the same. This may sound easy and self explanatory but a little unpacking is necessary. All of our children are of equal worth or value. We love them the same. Treating them as equals meant that we didn’t compare

them with each other. Our oldest didn't become the standard for the younger. Each of them has their own gifts and graces. Each is their own person for which we are commissioned by God to validate and point in the right direction for them—the direction they should go. If one was neat and orderly we'd say that was the way he/she were not "You should be just like him!" Of course each had to clean up and maintain some order. If one was good at something that didn't mean he/she was better in value than the others. It meant that each had things they were good at and not so good at. Comparing only occurred when they knew their value was not at stake. **Treating them the same or fair meant the rules were applied squarely.** There were no favorites. It also means that treating them the same doesn't mean exactly the same! For example if we are going to get some ice cream we didn't buy vanilla for all four of them, some of them didn't like vanilla. We didn't buy the same clothes, colors, styles, etc. for each one either. Treating them the same means entering their world and being faithful to provide guidance, leadership, encouragement, supplies, provisions, or decisions for each as if we were them—integrity! If I were them, with their interests, with their gifts, with their abilities, etc. what would I want, do, or need?

Notes:

a.) **The Bible says that it is diligent discipline that works.** We can establish the game rules in our home, but it takes the courage, the strength, and endurance to enforce them that pay off. While they are young there is more work, but it pays off as they get older. Even the older siblings will by example and reminder help correct a younger brother or sister.

b.) **Fairness is desirable, but not always accomplished.** Discipline sometimes needs to be personally adapted to a particular child's needs. Some may need more discipline than others due to temperament. I try to remember what it was like growing up with four siblings and some of the gripes I had. Placing ourselves in their shoes helps us to determine what should be done, if anything at all. Discipline that is too strict can be just as destructive as discipline that is non-existent. A balance requires some faith. Prayer about particular issues or reoccurring problems is most beneficial. God will enlighten us as to the best way to deal with our children. Although parenting can be one of the most guilt producing jobs, God is for us and on our side.