




Baby Step #1
Take Care of Yourself

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Hi! My name is Paul

“Hi! My name is Paul. I have six daughters.” Most of the time when people hear this they either think I’m Catholic or, the other extreme, a playboy who sowed his seed with total indiscretion. Neither is true. I am madly in love with the lovely and talented Mrs. Peterson, and together we have brought into this world six amazing ladies!

My experience with parenting goes like this... MOST of the time I like being “dad.” MOST of the time I love coming home. MOST of the time I enjoy those decades old jokes (you know, they’re the same ones you told your parents and now your kids are telling you and you have to act like you’ve never heard it AND that it is funny). MOST of the time I like hearing about their day. MOST of the time I like going out in public with all of these ladies. But there are days... you’ve had them too! Those days when you would prefer to act like those screaming kids belong to someone else so that you can make snide remarks and shoot condescending looks at those irresponsible and awful parents. Or better yet, those days when you can binge on Netflix and Doritos and act like you’re single with no responsibility. There are days when you simply cannot endure one more child initiated drama, and you swear to God that if you hear your nickname (DAD! MOM!) again you will simply change your name and move to another country. (Come on, you know you’ve felt this way too.)

Seriously, I love being a parent, but there are days when I just want to run away! There are days when I just want to quietly slip in the front door and right upstairs into my Mandom (aka Man Cave) ... a land where there is no tattling, arguing, or drama; a land where my rulings are unquestioned and my belongings left untouched. Do you know what I’m talking about? Some days we feel too tired, inadequate, distracted or frustrated to do what parenting requires of us! Welcome to parenting in the “First Half.”

I have learned some things that will help you enjoy the first half of parenting, which I define as starting at birth and ending around 10 years of age. This article will help you get started with the most important lesson about parenting young children! Enjoy, and always remember this, **“You’ve got this!”**

Me with the lovely and ever talented Mrs. Peterson!



Our six ladies!





Then we had a baby.

Do you remember how excited you were when you realized you were going to be a parent? I do!

Sherri and I could barely contain ourselves! We started talking about what we would and would not do as parents. Believe it or not, **before we even had a child we were experts on parenting.**

If you would have asked us, we would have had an answer to any parenting problem you might have had. **Then we had a baby!** HOLY COW! We didn't see that coming... the sleepless nights, inconveniently timed poops, the loud and constant demands of a person with whom we could not reason, and lots of other surprises too! Geeze! It wasn't long before these self-appointed parenting experts were exhausted, and ready to turn in our parenting credentials! This led to a critical discovery that has liberated us and gave us permission to do what we needed to do. **We learned that we MUST care for ourselves!**



The proverb that changed my life

“...parents are the pride of their children.”

I had always heard that children are the pride of their parents... and sometimes that is true.

But I read a sentence that turned things around for me. This sentence, written by Solomon, the wise king of ancient Israel, says something different than what I had always heard, ***“...parents are the pride of their children”*** (Proverbs 17:6 NLT). That sentence was a game-changer for me! *I* was to be the pride of my children... not the other way around!

This game-changing sentence is in the Bible, in a book called “Proverbs.” A proverb is a general truth, not a guarantee, but something that is true often enough to be common sense.

Matthew Henry, a Bible scholar, wrote about this proverb: “They [parents] are so [i.e. the pride of their children], that is, they should be so, and, if they conduct themselves worthily, they are so.” In other words, parents have the *potential* to be the pride of their children. They are not necessarily so, but they have the opportunity and the potential to be so... if they pay attention to some things (“conduct themselves worthily”). As a parent, with a few years under my belt and six kids to my credit, I have thought a lot about this proverb, and I think Matthew Henry is right. **We have the potential to be the pride of our children if we “conduct ourselves worthily”.**



Laundry rooms and Dining rooms

Do you have a room in your house where the door is always closed? It's that room that your kids and husband have been told, in no uncertain terms, that if anyone outside the family ever sees it, someone will die!

For us that room is the laundry room. If that room were ever included in the tour of our house, people would go missing... namely the people who opened the door for our guests to see that room! Remember, Sherri and I have six girls! Girls make laundry... lots of laundry! One small laundry room + seven ladies + one dude = A LOT OF LAUNDRY! That room can be a bit cluttered, and embarrassing!

Then there is the dining room. Our dining room has a fresh coat of paint on it, a cool light, a classy looking table covered with pretty things (place settings, candles, etc.). That is a room that we love to show off! We are proud of the way it looks and feels... and no one will go missing because they showed it off!

You probably have rooms like this in your house too! Rooms that you are proud of, and a room or two to which you militantly guard the door forbidding anyone to see it! One room you gladly show to family and friends; the other would embarrass you if people saw it! You know this - there are rooms in our house, and people in our lives that are a mess. We are not proud of them, and they do *not* add tremendous value to our lives. On the other hand, there are rooms in our house that are put together and good to be in, and there are people in our lives that are put together and good to be around... they make us proud and add value to us! Whether rooms in your house or people in your life, **you are not proud of a mess and it does not add value to your life, but you are proud of beauty, and it does add value to your life.**



You are the most important influence in your child's life!

Parents, we are this to our children... a mess or beauty.

You will be a mess or a beauty; you will be a point of embarrassment or pride for your children depending on the choices you make about your own life, and that's why it's so important that you take care of yourself and "conduct yourself worthily."

Now here is the thing, whether you are a mess or a beauty, you are most likely the most important influence in your children's life.



Mom and Dad, you are IMPORTANT!

James Kouzes and Barry Posner have done much research on what makes a leader. In their book “The Truth About Leadership” they write,

“For a long time now we’ve been asking people about the leader role models in their own lives. Not well-known historical leaders, but leaders with whom they have had personal experience. We asked them to identify the person they’d select as their most important role model for leadership.”

After they asked the question, they would give the survey participants eight categories from which these leaders might have come: business leader, community or religious leader, entertainer or Hollywood star, family member, political leader, professional athlete, teacher or coach, or other/none/not sure.

When the results were tallied they discovered that,

“Regardless of whether one is under or over thirty years of age, when thinking back over their lives and selecting their most important leader role models, people are more likely to choose a family member than anyone else.”

Then they write this breathtaking sentence, **“Mom and Dad, it turns out, are the most influential leaders after all.”**



Take a break before you flip the page...

Parents! We are the biggest influencers in our kids' lives! Our mess and/or our beauty will influence our children more than any other person or experience. Think about this, you are who you are today *because of* or *in spite of* your parents! You have stood on what they have passed on to you, or stepped over their garbage in your life to become the person you are today! Like it or not, your parents were the key shapers of your young life, and you are the key shaper of your children's lives!

I am going to give you one really important sentence.

Do not read any further if you are distracted!

STOP!

Go get some coffee, take a bathroom break, do some jumping jacks!

What I'm about to say to you is absolutely critical if you want to stay and do well in the parenting game!

Ready? Here we go!



The better you are...

The better you are, the better they are!

There is a principle I have seen at work in the lives of parents that I respect, and in my own life; it goes like this, ***the better you are the better they are.***

That sentence is a game changer! Tired parents are not great parents. Stressed parents are not great parents. Weak parents are not great parents. Spiritually and emotionally starved parents are not great parents!

If you want to be a great parent to great kids, you must pay attention to yourself.

That is what we do with things that make us proud! Whether a room in our house, a car, the lawn, or our body, we pay attention to and care for the things that make us proud!

Remember what Solomon said, “Parents are the pride of their children.” If you want this verse to be a reality for your kids, you must care for and work on yourself!



“You are the best gift you can give your child!”

Kids whose parents are working on creating beauty in their own lives are kids who have and will have a sense of pride. Kids whose parents’ lives are falling apart are kids who will deal with shame and either reproduce that mess or be forced to find different role models. Another way to say it, for all of you poets in the house...

If you are a beauty, you will be their pride.

If you are a mess, someone they will hide.

I like to think about it like this; *you* are the best gift you can give to your children! Where are the gifts they got last Christmas? How about the birthday presents from last year? The “things” we get them quickly get broke, sold/traded, or tossed to the side because of a loss of interest. YOU however were there before any toy and you will be there after the last toy breaks or is given away! You really are the best gift you can give to your child!



3 kinds of gifts...

When I think about this, I like to ask myself this question, **“Am I a gift they will hide or point to?”**

When you think about it, there are three kinds of gifts (from a kid’s perspective).

There is the **“Embarrassing Gift.”** This is toy from Grandma who does not realize that her grandson is not a toddler anymore! He is not going to use it. He is not going to tell anyone he got it for Christmas, and he is not going to let anyone know he has it. In fact, he is going to get rid of it as quick as he can... **“Hello Goodwill.”**

Then there is the **“Not Helpful Gift.”** This gift is not terrible but not terribly useful either when you are a kid. It is like a tie. He might wear it if you force him to for picture day, but on every other occasion it’s going to stay tucked away in the closet... not embarrassing, but not helpful.

Then there is the **“Helpful.”** He tells everyone about this gift! It is the gift that makes his friends say, **“Ohhhh!”** That is the **“Helpful Gift.”**



They will not care for you.

How would you describe yourself as a gift to your child? Are you Embarrassing?

Not Helpful? Helpful?

What would happen to your parenting style if you begin to see yourself as a gift to your child? Are you embarrassing, not helpful, helpful?

The best way for us as parents to be beautiful and helpful and to make our kids proud is to take care of ourselves!

Here is the kicker... if you do not take care of yourself... no one will. Dad/Mom *you* must pay attention to you! If you do not, you will be a mess... you will be an embarrassment... you will not add value to your children... and you will not make them proud. They will not point to you. They will hide you.

Pay attention to ALL of you

Time for some self-analysis...

Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell wrote a book called, “The Five Love Languages of Children” (I *strongly* encourage you to read this book). In this book, they speak to parents about this matter of caring for ourselves:

“...we parents must give attention to our own physical and emotional health. For physical health, we need balanced patterns of sleeping, eating, and exercising. For emotional health, self-understanding and a mutually supportive marital relationship are crucial.”

What they say about physical and emotional is true in several other venues as well. Take a minute to do a personal inventory

- Spiritually - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?
- Mentally - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?
- Relationally - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?
- Financially - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?

It cannot hurt to ask the same questions about physical, and emotional wellbeing:

- Physically - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?
- Emotionally - Are you a beauty or a mess? Do they point to you or hide you?



One thing I have not experienced as a parent...

I have been a parent for fifteen years and I have six different personalities that call me “dad.” I love each of my children strongly, and they love me (most of the time). I have had many experiences as a dad, **but one thing I have not experienced is for my children to walk into my office or bedroom and say, “Dad/Mom! How can I help you create beauty in your spiritual life? How can I help you make time to do some extra reading or go to the gym?”**

I would bet a dollar that you have not had that happen either! The truth is that if you are not paying attention to these areas in your life no one will... and if no one is... you are going to become a mess... and when you are a mess... they will not be proud of the gift of you. The truth here is that YOU have to care for you, and when you do you will get better and the better you are the better they are.

So how does a busy parent care for him/herself? Let me give you two ideas that will get you started.



2 ways to care for yourself

“If EVERYTHING you do makes your child happy, you are going to gift the world with a terrible adult.”

A while ago, I presented a series of lessons, at the church I pastor, called #worstparentever. During this series, I told our church about a mentor who told me that **if your kids say, “You’re the worst parent ever” it might actually be a sign that you are doing a good job!**

I told them that great parents are going to hear things like this from time to time, and encouraged them not to be discouraged when they do! I like to remind myself and other parents that If EVERYTHING you do makes your child happy, you are going to gift the world with a terrible adult! Sometimes you need to be the #worsparentever so that your child will mature into a great adult!

Now, to care for yourself and make yourself a better gift for your kids means that sometimes you’re going to have to do things that make you the “Worst Parent Ever”, and make your kids unhappy. Let me give some examples, and these will obviously be adjusted according to the age of your child.



#1 Make your kids unhappy!

Put those kiddos to bed early so you can focus on your spouse or just enjoy some personal time. Just a thought on this... you should not have the same bedtime as your kids! Put those little crumb crunchers to bed well before you head there! That gives you the last part of the day to prepare for tomorrow, enjoy your spouse, or just have a few moments of quiet peace! Your kids won't like it... but it doesn't matter, it's part of YOU taking care of you.

In our home, on school nights, everyone under twenty-one heads upstairs at 7:30 p.m. The little girls are in bed with lights off while the older girls are in their rooms quietly reading or getting ready for the next day. This quiet space allows Sherri and me to “close the house down” while talking with one another about the events of the day, flirting, and maybe even sneaking in an episode of our favorite show on Netflix!



#1 Make your kids unhappy!

Here is something else that will not make your kids terribly happy – *don't give in to the pressure to buy your kiddos everything they want!* For instance, buying them the new version of the phone that all their friends have... even when it's not in your budget! This decision may earn you the not-so-desirable rating of “Worst Parent Ever” but believe me, hearing those words when you have some money in the bank is not so bad as hearing those words and being broke! This is part of you taking care of you; saying “No” to their immediate financial demands so that you can say “Yes” to more important things in the future... like college... or your retirement! **I have seen too many parents live stressed out financially because they do not want to make their kids unhappy!** Because of that stress, they are tired, angry, frustrated, etc. and they begin to slip in their parenting game. Parents like this have traded their well-being for a piece of technology that will be outdated in six months (or less). It is not worth it... and neither is the phone.



#1 Make your kids unhappy!

Here's another one...

Eat healthy and have them eat healthy so you can fully engage with your family!

I am amazed at how parents feed themselves and their children trash and then expect high performance! I am not going to spend a lot of time fleshing this out here but I think it is necessary to say that if you feed your kids everything they want, you will gift the world with an adult who is sick, obese, and unhappy.

By the way, what is true for your kiddos is true for you too! Saying “No” to excessive junk food will definitely make your kids unhappy, and it may even put a scowl on your face for a while, but it will pay off soon enough! You will feel better, look better, sleep better, perform better, think better, pray better, and just be better all-around as you learn to control what you put in your mouth! Remember, the better you are the better they are! Eat good food and make your kids eat what you eat! You will be happier and so will they... I promise!



#2 Put “You” time on the calendar!

The second action step for caring for yourself is to **put “You” time on the calendar.**

If you do not plan your time, someone else will, and his or her plan will not include a lot of “self-care” time for you! Their plan will include a lot of “care time” with you caring for them! Kids take a lot of time; they need a lot of time. From preparing meals to helping with homework to managing their calendars to playing games to tucking them in bed... all of that requires time. If you are not careful, you will end most days by falling into bed exhausted and wondering “Does this ever end?” You will not exercise, read, go out with friends, pray, or just quietly sip a cup of coffee anymore... all of those activities will be “things I used to do” ... you will be like most parents... exhausted.

Right now you might be saying, “How did he know that’s how I feel?”

Because I have felt like that! Then one day I realized, if I do not carve out time to care for myself... no one will. So, I did. Then we carved out time for Sherri! I am a husband, dad to six girls, I have worked multiple jobs exceeding well over 60 hours a week, and I am doing some writing these days. Sherri is a wife, a mom to six girls, and she works outside of our home too. Oh, you should know this, we have one car for our family of eight! In spite of all of this... both Sherri and I have scheduled time for ourselves every day ... time to work out, read, pray, talk with a friend, or just be by ourselves. It has made a HUGE difference in our home and in our parenting game! Why? Because we learned this principle, **the better you are the better your kids will be!**



You've got this!

“...you can create a beautiful life that will be a helpful gift to your children, and make them proud.”

Dad and mom, if you are going to make this proverb a reality, “parents are the pride of their children”; you are going to have to take care of yourself: pray, exercise, date, read a book, make a budget, etc. The good news is that you can do this! If you are willing to make your kids unhappy from time to time, and insist on time and resources to care for yourself, you can create a beautiful life that will be a helpful gift to your children and make them proud!

You can do this! You've got this!

F I R S T

half parenting

You can find out more about Paul on his social media:

 [Instagram.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.instagram.com/thepaulpeterson)

 [Facebook.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.facebook.com/thepaulpeterson)



“The better you are, the better your kids will be!”

Paul Peterson

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