FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

Bulletin

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Tough Questions from Kids

Does God love people who don't pray?

Honoring Dads

JUST "DAD," PLEASE

BY JIM DALY

I COULD HAVE SWORN MY BOYS KNEW WHAT I DO FOR A LIVING. I mean, they see me go to work every morning, and I talk with them every night about my day.

My older son, Trent, never connected the dots. Until a friend of his said, "Hey, your dad is the president of Focus on the Family." Trent looked at him funny and said, "No, he works there, but he's not the president." Later that night, I actually had to convince Trent that his friend was right.

That story left me wondering, *Wow! How well do my children really know me?* I expected my boys to know my title at work because so much of my day is centered around the responsibilities that go with it.

That experience helped me shift my perspective. My boys will probably never think of me as "the president" of anything. And they won't think of all the other titles that often describe me, like "author," "boss" or "radio host." The only title for me they'll ever care about is "Dad."

Titles can mean a lot for our careers, and we want our children to see the hard work that goes into earning them. But our achievements will never replace our presence in our children's lives. Those are things that only moms and dads can offer. Not presidents.

BUT DAD SAID IT WAS OK

My husband, Evan, and I have always differed in how we parent our children. Even our play styles revealed a contrast. When our kids were little, I cooed. I built blanket forts and dragged armloads of books inside, where we read and giggled. Evan's style was to walk in the door, grab a toddler and throw her in the air with a "Whoooooop!"

At times, I've bristled at Evan's choices. He'd let the kids go down the street to play with neighbors that I didn't know as well as I wanted. He also saw nothing wrong with buying a trampoline for the backyard, while I could foresee nothing but emergency room visits and lawsuits.

One night we were at dinner when the trampoline subject came up.

"Please, Mom! Dad says it's OK!" I'd look at Evan. We'd had many, many conversations on this subject.

"When did you say it was OK?" I'd say in a tone that sounded like a hiss. He didn't miss the glare in my eyes. From my perspective, he was being irresponsible. And because that's what I thought, my actions became less than respectful.

Our parenting choices show us who we are. Our personalities. Our original family issues. Our differences. So how do we understand, accept and work on these differences? Every conflict is unique, but Evan and I learned two principles to guide our parenting disagreements: "Different doesn't mean wrong" and "We are better together."

Listening to another point of view and considering it stretches our understanding of each other. A young mom returns from an errand to see that her husband has put the baby's outfit on backward. Picking up the baby, she says, "This outfit buttons up the front!"

Puzzled, the dad checks for the tag and finds it on the side with the buttons, so he thinks that's the "back." The outfit actually looks fine either way. Although there is usually a right way to put on most clothing, in this case, having different perspectives did not have any long-term consequences for the baby. So no harm done.

Overall, children actually benefit from being exposed to different parenting perspectives. From these different styles of parenting, kids learn to try various options when learning new skills.

—*Elisa Morgan*

FORGIVENESS FOR HURTFUL WORDS

Dr. Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages,* tells of the time he learned that hurtful words can harm a relationship and shares why it's so important to listen to what your spouse is really trying to express.

It started when Dr. Chapman returned from a business trip and learned his wife had completed a small home improvement project. She proudly showed her work and then asked, "How do you like it?" His response was a mistake. Rather than looking at the quality of the work or acknowledging her labor of love, Dr. Chapman shrugged it off with a few careless words, "I like it, but to be honest, I liked the old color better."

His words destroyed weeks of excitement, planning and goodwill. And when he saw the damage his words caused, Dr. Chapman immediately apologized and worked to restore the relationship with his wife.

When he later shared this story at a speaking engagement, a man in the audience asked why Dr. Chapman apologized. "You really liked the former color better. Why should you apologize because she got upset?"

What is the right answer? Why should you apologize when your spouse takes offense at something you've said? Dr. Chapman says, "If I hurt my wife, whether intentionally or unintentionally, I should apologize to remove the emotional barrier between us. Apologizing does not mean that what I did was morally wrong; it means that I am deeply concerned that I have hurt her."

—*Bill Arbuckle*

DON'T LET TV RUIN YOUR MARRIAGE

See if this sounds familiar: You get home from work, eat dinner, turn on the TV, watch several shows with (or without) your spouse and then go to bed. Repeat the next day.

If that's you, you're not alone. According to Nielsen, American adults spend 11 hours and 27 minutes per day connected to media. Yet, we can't seem to find time to pray or read a devotional together.

How you spend that space in between church, work and friends is vitally important to the health of your relationship. Sure, there's nothing wrong with watching TV together sometimes or having a favorite show that you watch regularly. But if that's all you do, you're missing out and your marriage never reaches its potential.

—*Jonathan Hoover*

FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

We're getting married in a few months. I know I don't "marry" my soon-to-be new in-laws, but how do I get them to accept me? Any advice?

ANSWER:

Often husbands and wives assume they'll be loved and accepted by in-laws on the merit of marrying the in-laws' child. This may be the case, but it usually takes time to establish trust and respect. Just as it takes time to build other close relationships, gaining acceptance into a family doesn't happen instantly.

The No. 1 factor in resolving acceptance by in-laws is your spouse's support. It's an art to support your spouse without jumping into the fight or feeding his or her discontent.

When it comes to dealing with an in-law who doesn't seem to accept you, here are the main principles to remember:

- Learn to support your spouse without getting roped into taking sides.
- Encourage your spouse to share his or her feelings directly to you.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Show your spouse that he or she is No. 1 in your eyes.
- Don't take things too personally.
- Remind yourself that building a relationship takes time.
- Forgive, forgive, forgive.
- Remember that you're loving your spouse by honoring his or her parents.

One more idea: When confronted with what feels like a no-win situation involving in-laws, use the "drop the rope" theory. Imagine a rope in your hands. You can continue yanking on it—or drop it. Dropping it may sound as though you're giving up, but actually it's very empowering. It's also more effective than tugging back and forth.

(This article, adapted from the *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, is answered by contributor and professional counselor Romie Hurley.)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

ANSWER:

God loves all people, even those who don't love Him. God is delighted whenever someone honors Him or calls out to Him. He invites people to come to Him because He loves them; His love does not depend on whether or not a person prays. Prayer allows us to enjoy our relationship with God and see Him work in our life.

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