

IT ALL STARTS WITH YOU

Most of us mimic what we see. We learn by watching. From infancy, our family, friends, and culture shape and conform us into who we are as people. As men, husbands, and especially fathers, we often don't realize that we too are being watched, mimicked, and followed. If your daughter could turn on the television and watch how you live when you *think* nobody is watching would you be ashamed? I would at times. (Have you seen Jim Carey's *The Truman Show*? That's what the movie is about.)

Fathers, thirst for integrity. Pursue the high road in private. Seek God's heart for wisdom to lead. Get a bulldog grip on a commitment to

unconditional love. Bottom line, live as if people are watching you...because she is!

As someone who lived in Hawaii working and going to school, it's no surprise that I love the beach, warm ocean water, and lots of sunshine. Unfortunately, I now understand a clear lesson about parenting that I learned from all that sun. Crystal and I have confirmed: what we (parents) do in moderation our children will generally do in excess! Did you catch that? Please read it again.

Here's how that principle applies to me in this example. I did not use sunscreen in my Hawaiian days; however, I wanted my daughters to use it. As you can imagine, telling the girls to use SPF 60 sunscreen when I was unwilling to wear it myself rendered me ineffective in that area. I wanted them to do what I said, not what I did.

Fathers, if this describes you, I have two words for you: Good luck! My friend, James Ryle, hit the nail on the head when he said, "Your children may not always heed your advice, but they will never escape your influence." With that in mind, here are a few ideas to encourage you. Try giving:

A little more love: When my girls were in certain stages, it's funny how I so easily saw their weaknesses. I noticed impatience, selfishness, pride, cheating, and other shortcomings. One day, the light came on for me. I realized that every fault I noticed in my daughters had been alive in me at one time or another. The only difference was my "eyesight." My acute vision with their weaknesses ignored blindness to my own flaws. If you can relate, ask

your daughter for forgiveness. Then exchange judgment and ridicule for a little more love.

A little more joy: Work stress, finances, extended family issues, marriage, car troubles, *plus* fathering three teenage girls at the same time is a lot to carry.

The difference between happiness and joy is that happiness is based on our present circumstances. Joy, on the other hand, is not measured by circumstances. Joy is a choice. If your daughter is “killing you” right now and you feel attacked and deflated by her rather than loved and honored, choose joy. Why? Because what you now see in your daughter is *not* the final product! Like her father, she is a work in progress. Don’t see her as she is today; see her as what she will become. I actually shared this with one of my girls, and it helped her attitude and the way she saw herself.

One of my friends has been described as someone who “spills joy” onto everyone he encounters. Do you think this man has heard only the answer “yes” and never “no”? Do you think doors have only opened for him and never closed? I know that’s not the case. So what’s the key to having a response like his? It’s a choice. Choose joy, and eventually you’ll have enough of it to spill over onto others too—guaranteed!

A little more peace: Two of our girls were fighting and arguing back and forth. It seemed like it would never stop. I felt exhausted. The only thing I wanted to do was run away but decided not to because I knew when I came back home they would still be fighting!

With maturity comes a little more peace. Our peace cannot depend upon the ups and downs of a teenage girl. Be the parent. Allow her to be the daughter. Be consistent. Why? Because with consistency, you will be what she needs but simply doesn't realize yet. Gentlemen, like you, throughout the years I have had some difficult seasons with my girls. I've gone on record as saying the more I got to know my teenager, the more I loved my dog. Need some peace at your home? Take a walk outside—it simply may be around the block.

A little more patience: I remember the first time I had to change a diaper. To keep from losing my cool, I put Jimmy Piersall's baseball diaper-changing method into action: "Spread the diaper in the position of a baseball diamond with you at bat. Then fold second base down to home and set the baby on the pitcher's mound. Put first base and third together, bring up home plate, and pin the three together. Of course, in case of rain, you get to call the game and start all over again." Seriously, we can find the energy and staying power to parent teenage girls today because, like the babies we once diapered, they will not stay that way forever. Patience, my friend, is a graduate virtue. Model patience so your daughter will extend it to her own children some day.

A little more kindness/goodness/gentleness: When our youngest came, I had work and Crystal had three other girls to care for, plus we were in the middle of a major move. Kindness, goodness, and gentleness were all qualities I needed but lacked. Funny how we're put in situations that bring forth character traits we need. Though uncomfortable, we become better

people through those times. Muscle only grows through resistance.

A little more self-control: At times one of the girls would insist on doing things her way. If I had it to do over again, I would have prayed for more balance and discretion, because life experience has taught me that acting like a marine corps drill sergeant is highly ineffective with young girls. Thank God that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). Gentlemen, it’s because of my experience that I’m able to share these things with you. I feel as though I’ve made ample mistakes in parenting our daughters. Please learn from my blunders. One thing I know for sure—my ace card is that I love my girls. Make a mistake, lose my cool, and overreact? When I follow up with an apology and a loving embrace, lo and behold, fellowship is restored.

How does this happen? Because love covers over my wrongs. Love promotes healing in little girls’ hearts. Love diminishes my errors. Do you see it? My relationship with my daughters is a picture of my relationship with my heavenly Father. I make mistakes, wrong turns, negative choices, and yet because God’s Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross, His shed blood eliminates all of my wrongdoing and sin. The question, men, is: Why? Why would my heavenly Father do this for me, for us? The answer: Love. In like fashion, the way His love covers my errors, our love for our daughters covers our less-than-perfect actions and attitudes.

Imagine what life would be like if we each had just a little bit more self-control. It’s good to step back and think about the small ways we can grow spiritual fruit in our lives: the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, and *self-*

control. Our daughters' best shot at self-control is when they see it in our lives. That thought motivates me to the max! Parenting is tough work. I wish it were as easy as one-two-three and a snap of my fingers. Unfortunately, it's not.

My daughters have watched and observed me for so long that many of my worst habits could become second nature to them. That's why we must lead by example. If you don't want your kids to do something wrong or negative, don't do it yourself.

In the movie *The Truman Show*, a character tells Truman, "Everything that's happening to you is real. What you don't know is that someone's watching you." What a powerful wake-up call for us.

Dads, if you want your daughter to love you, then love her sacrificially and unconditionally. If you want her to be a kind, faithful servant, show her how. Too many of us don't walk the talk. Today, however, is your opportunity to start over.



ACTION STEPS

- Live like you're being watched 24/7, because, in reality, you are.
- Incorporate spiritual fruit into every area of your life—you'll be amazed at the difference this makes.
- Walk the talk! Hypocritical lifestyles are a dead-end street.