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# THE HERALD

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## Your Most Important Job as a Parent

By Dennis Rainey

I had just pitched my travel bag in the back of our Honda station wagon. I turned on the ignition and was about to back out of the garage to head off to the airport for a business trip when I saw my daughter Ashley had walked up to the driver's side window. Rolling the window down, I smiled, and asked, "What's up, Princess?"

Ashley's eyes looked down. Quietly and slowly her words escaped: "Dad, I'm afraid your plane is going to crash." Then she gently placed her hand on my forearm.

A few weeks earlier, a Delta jet had crashed in Dallas. Our family heard the news live on the car radio as we were returning from vacation. Ashley had heard the reporters talk about first responders, billowing smoke, and casualties.

My 11-year-old Princess was afraid.

So I did what every dad tries to do ... I tried to fix it by addressing her fears with

logic. "Airplane engines are among the best-maintained pieces of machinery in all the world," I told her. I could tell she wasn't feeling comfort, so I continued. "Airplanes are much safer than cars—and you've never seen our car just quit driving down the road, have you?"

The pained look on her face wasn't going away. Finally, I got it. She didn't need an engineering lesson. She needed her daddy to speak to her soul about faith. I needed to seize this teachable moment.

I regrouped and silently prayed the prayer of the helpless parent: "Lord, help me know what to say here." Then I put my hand on her hand, looked in her eyes and said, "Princess, it's okay to feel afraid. I'm glad you told me. I have things that frighten me, too." She nodded.

"In a few moments, I need to leave and go to the airport. I wish I could stay here with you, but I can't. But there is someone who is always with you. You can cast all your fears on Jesus Christ. He'll be with you after I leave ... and for the rest of your life."

To help her visualize what I was saying, I explained, "Picture a bunch of cords coming from you to your mom and me. Our assign-

ment as parents is to help you unplug those cords from us and help you plug them into God.” I took her hand and “unplugged” one of those imaginary cords from me, then stretched her arm above her head toward heaven and plugged her cord into God.

A tiny smile lit Ashley’s sweet face. She reached above her head, unplugged her invisible cord from God, plugged it back into me, and said, “But what if I don’t wanna plug into God?”

For a moment silence and that invisible cord hung in the air. Then I looked her in the eyes, unplugged her cord from me, plugged it back into God, and said, “But you gotta!”

We both smiled. Then I took her hands in mine and said, “I need to get to the airport. May I pray for you?” She nodded and I prayed, “Lord, help Ashley talk to You and trust You with her fears. And, God, please keep me safe on this trip!”

As I pulled out of the driveway, I waved at Ashley and she grinned back. My little girl was becoming a young lady. I thought about how the culture she was growing up in didn’t have many moorings, and how she would need to grow in her experience of depending on Christ.

This treasured moment with our daughter is a snapshot of your most important job of a parent: To pass on a living faith, parent to child.

From our observations and experience over the years, it seems that most parents today have three basic goals for their children:

We want our children to be safe.  
 . . . to be happy.  
 . . . to be successful.

But how do we achieve those goals? You only have so much control as a parent. No matter how much you protect your children, they will still be touched by danger, by injury, by sickness.

Our good friend Ann Wilson said it this way:

“Some people would say, ‘I just want my kids just to be happy.’ And I feel like that’s not good enough. Because first of all there’s going to be so much hardship and heartache that our kids are going to experience. Happiness is just an emotion that comes and goes. But I want my kids, in the long run, to feel like I’m here for a purpose and on purpose. I am here to be on mission, because God has something for me, that he’s put in me, that he wants me to do. . . . I want them to live for Jesus.”

She’s so right. You can give them happy moments and memories, but you can’t prevent them from experiencing sadness or anger or fear or disappointment.

You can help them build useful skills and a strong work ethic, and give them the best education you can afford. But at some point, they will leave home and make their own choices, and you won’t be able to control the outcomes.

That’s why having a living faith and passing that faith on are so important.

When you encourage your children to es-

establish and develop a relationship with the one true God, that connection will keep them safe in His hands no matter what they experience, it will give them a reason to be happy in the midst of fear and sorrow ... and it will make them successful as they seek to follow God's will for their lives.

In fact, when you are closely connected to God, safety and happiness and success will look different, because God defines them differently than our culture does. Nothing is more important than connecting your children with their Creator, with the sovereign, unchanging, eternal God who ultimately controls their destiny. That's your real target as a parent.

We guarantee that there is nothing more satisfying than watching your children grow into adults and work through everything life throws at them when you know at their core they walk with God. As verse 4 of John 3 says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Not many days after my garage conversation with Ashley, I had the privilege of seizing another teachable moment with 10-year-old Benjamin.

It was evening, and Barbara was away at a meeting. I read a few stories to the kids, tucked them into bed, and prayed with them. I told Benjamin that he could read until 9:00 but then he had to hit the hay. But five minutes after 9:00, as I was at work writing in my study, I felt a child's presence next to my chair. It was Benjamin.

Pushing my chair back from the computer, I asked, "What's up, buddy? You're supposed to be in bed."

Sheepishly, Benjamin replied, "Dad, I was reading Huckleberry Finn and there were these robbers ..." He paused, looking at the floor, then went on, "Dad, I'm afraid some robbers are going to come get me while I'm sleeping."

I pulled him close, gave him a firm hug, and said, "Hey, it's all right. Let me tell you what happened with Ashley the other morning." I went on to share about her fears and the promise of unplugging her dependence on me and plugging it into God.

I took Benjamin's hand to pull out one of those invisible cords and plug it above his head into God. Then I felt another child's presence in the room. It was Ashley. "What's going on?" she inquired.

"Benjamin is a little afraid," I said.

"Benjamin, you mean you are afraid?" Ashley said with surprise sprinkled with a tiny bit of glee.

"Yeah," Benjamin sheepishly responded, trying not to, but finally admitting he had a need.

Ashley then told him about her garage theology class. After praying with them, I scooted them off to bed. I turned and looked over my shoulder, watching them walk up the stairs together. They were side by side, and Ashley had her arm around her brother. "It's okay, Benjamin," she said, "I'm going through the same thing."

Teachable moments are opportunities for us to imprint God's values on the next generation. They represent God's ordained means to pass on His agenda to our children.

# FUNNIES

The story goes that a certain court jester went too far one day and insulted his king. The king became so infuriated that he sentenced the jester to be executed. His court prayed upon the king to have mercy for this man who had served him well for so many years. After a time, the king relented only enough to give the jester his "choice" as to how he would like to die. True to form, the jester replied, "if it's all the same to you my Lord, I'd like to die of old age."

The Reverend Francis Norton woke up Sunday morning and, realizing it was an exceptionally beautiful and sunny early spring day, decided he just had to play golf. He told the Associate Pastor that he was feeling sick, and he would have to fill in for him.

Setting up on the first tee, he was alone. After all, it was Sunday morning and everyone else was in church!

At about this time, Saint Peter leaned over to the Lord while looking down from the heavens and exclaimed, "You're not going to let him get away with this, are you?" The Lord sighed, and said, "No, I guess not."

Just then Father Norton hit the ball and it shot straight towards the pin, dropping just short of it, rolled up and fell into the hole. IT WAS A 420-YARD HOLE IN ONE! St. Peter was astonished. He looked at the Lord and asked, "Why did you let him do that?" The Lord smiled and replied, "Who's he going to tell?"

One afternoon a man came home from work to find total mayhem in his house. His three children were outside, still in their pajamas, playing in the mud, with empty food boxes and wrappers strewn all around the front yard. The door of his wife's car was open, as was the front door to the house.

Proceeding to the entry, he found an even bigger mess. A lamp had been knocked over, and the throw rug was wadded against one wall. In the front room, the TV was loudly blaring a cartoon channel, and the family room was strewn with toys and various items of clothing. In the kitchen, dishes filled the sink, breakfast food was spilled on the counter, dog food was spilled on the floor, a broken glass lay under the table, and a small pile of sand was spread by the back door.

He quickly headed up the stairs, stepping over the toys and more piles of clothes, looking for his wife. He was worried she may be ill, or that something serious had happened. He found her lounging in the bedroom, still curled in the bed in her pajamas, reading a novel.

She looked up at him, smiled, and asked how his day went. He looked at her bewildered and asked, "What happened here today?"

She again smiled and answered, "You know every day when you come home from work and ask me what in the world did I do today?"

"Yes," was his incredulous reply.

She answered, "Well, today I didn't do it."