

Setting An Example

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The scripture tells us to be a witness, not to give a witness. When I think about the gifts we can give our children as an example, I would list at least four:

(a) Reading - an interesting survey among adults who enjoyed reading showed that they were not necessarily readers as children but saw their parents reading. Therefore they considered reading an adult behavior.

(b) Emotional Control - maturity can be modeled. Children have a short emotional wheelbase—when you make them mad they drop down and scream until you give them what they want. Then they jump up smiling. And that's not a lot different from some of the executives that I've worked with. Do our children see an example of emotional control and maturity? This is a lifelong gift that we can give them.

(c) Financial responsibility - do our children see us able to delay gratification as we exercise financial responsibility? I spoke at a Nazarene lay meeting and the bishop said he'd like to tell me a story that explained his heritage. His father had been a dry-dirt farmer, which meant that they would have droughts when the whole crop would be lost. They had then to borrow money from the bank in order to get seed for the next year. This particular time there were three straight years of drought and so they had no money for seed and they owed money to the bank without being able to get any more. His father went into public work just to make enough money for the family but he worked and saved because he wanted to pay off the loan at the bank. Five years later he went in with the money and told the president he had the money and wanted to pay off his loan. The president laughed and said, "We wrote that off three years ago because we knew you couldn't pay it." My father told him, "I didn't write it off, I owe it and I intend to pay it.!" To which the bank president replied, "We don't even know where we'd put the money." Dad said, "That's your problem. My problem is to pay it." He gave them the money and left. He said his father was as happy as he had ever seen him when he came home. Then the bishop turned to me and said "Fred, that is my heritage that I must live up to."

(d) Perseverance - most of us at some time lose- the important thing is not to quit. Our children should know that quitting is not in us. One of my friends who has a financial institution called me and said that during a downturn one man had become so depressed that he was talking about suicide. I'm not a psychologist, but I simply asked him if he had any children. When he said yes, I asked him if he would like to leave an example of suicide for his children. Statistics show that children of suicides are much more prone toward suicide themselves. I wanted him to model

standing tough so that the children would know how to face their own valleys. He took the question seriously and survived.

Another situation happened back in 1974 during the downturn in real estate when a friend asked me to have lunch with him at the Dallas Country Club. He told me he had gone broke and couldn't make it back any more--- he was through. I suggested that quitting was such a serious decision that he ought to write out a rational answer as to why quitting made good sense and to sign it. I suggested he go home that night, get his wife, sit down at the table and write out a statement of quitting and then sign it. A few weeks later I saw him and asked him how he came along and he said, "We wrote it out just as you suggested but we couldn't bring ourselves to sign it," and so they didn't. Today he is successful in another state.

When we think of giving we automatically think of money, but isn't it just as important to give the gifts of reading, emotional discipline, financial responsibility and perseverance? As parents we are here to teach them to fish, not just to feed them. Parents who exemplify stewardship and stability are a lifelong gift.