

Marbles Improve Parenting... By Gary Taylor

2008-04-06 19:04:18 by Steve Wright

While assembling a large, wooden play set for our kids in the backyard, I fell from the top of a 6-foot stepladder. (Have you noticed the sign on ladders stating, "*Caution! This is not a step?*" The manufacturer isn't kidding.) During my descent, I extended my right hand back to cushion my fall.

My fat self landed pretty hard as I learned that fingers aren't strong enough to support the weight of my 250 pounds. I crashed hard, and took one glance at my right hand to see blood, exposed bone and connective tissue. My once-straight fingers were pointing in painfully strange directions.

At the E.R. my fingers were popped back into place, and shortly thereafter I began a few months of rehab with a hand specialist. One of her prescribed forms of torturing me - she called it "rehab" - was to pick up marbles between my broken fingers, transferring them from the tabletop into a Tupperware container.

I could have conquered the marble quandary in a variety of ways. I could roll the marbles off the edge of the table and into the container. Or I could have even used my good hand. But that would have been cheating myself of the intended benefits of the exercise. Transferring the marbles into Tupperware wasn't the point; GETTING ME HEALTHY was the point.

Allow me to use sarcasm. When I showed up for rehab, the doctor never said, "*Gary, I'm so glad you're here because we have a problem with spilled marbles!*" Instead, she said this: "*Gary, I'm glad you're here because we have some marbles that will help with your problem.*"

My problem??? Yes. Because I am a broken freak. My hand wasn't healthy, but her desire was to use marbles to fully restore that hand, to make it whole and healthy.

Now for application... Ya see, I subconsciously thought that I was like "God's gift" to my kids, and even to those in my church. Somehow I perverted God's call on my life as I thought I heard Him say, "Gary, I'm so glad you're here because we have a problem with spilled marbles and wayward kids!" It was a type of a Gary-to-the-rescue way of going through life, as if I were God's gift to my family.

But what if I was the one in need of healing and repair???

 Actually, there is no "if" about it; I am a broken freak. My heart and my thoughts and my desires point in Godless directions in much the same way as the crooked fingers of my right hand.

I am gaining greater clarity on my calling in life. I hear God saying, "Gary, I'm glad you're here because we have some scattered marbles (wayward children) that will help with YOUR problem."

MY problem??? Yep. I think one of the best first steps I can take as a parent is to admit that I'm a broken freak. And apart from God's grace, neither my kids nor I have a chance to become more like Christ.

When we read startling statistics pertaining to topics such as teen violence, sexual immorality, or broken homes, may I caution against immediately donning your superhero cape, thinking that you are God's gift to all the scattered marbles of this world? Should we engage in battling these atrocities plaguing our nation and homes? Certainly we should!

But maybe, just maybe, God will use those marbles to straighten out the crookedness of your heart.

Do you know when Beth (my wife) and I feel most fulfilled in parenting? It's actually NOT those (extremely) rare moments when our kids obey. Instead it's when we recognize that the humble service of parenting is an avenue through which God wants to make she and I more like Christ.

I have a three-year old and a five-year old "marble" in our home that help with my problem. None of us parent our children because we have our act together. Rather, we are to engage with our kids as one way that God can whittle away at us, pruning us, making us more like Christ. Even when it feels like torture, God sees it as therapy, as rehab.

Maybe you find yourself excused from this holiest of callings by saying, "*Who am I - with my crookedness*

and brokenness and pain - who am I to disciple my family?"

God looks at you - the broken you, the wayward you, the crooked and imperfect you - and says, "I'm so glad you are here because we have some "marbles" around here that will help your problem."

Come Get Me... by Gary Taylor

2008-04-18 21:04:16 by Steve Wright



I purchased journals for each of my two children. They don't write in these journals, but rather I write to them in their respective journals.

In these journals I write various things:

- ~Intercessory prayers on their behalf...
 - ~Ways their words or actions pointed me back to the graciousness of God...
 - ~Funny things they said or did...
 - ~Reflections on the gift of their life...
- (And then there are times when I journal just to prove to my kids that I was so smart I could write in cursive.)

I have a couple letters my mom wrote to me, one of which I received after she passed away. Do I need to tell you that those letters are two of my most prized possessions? I want to continue that spiritual legacy with my children. Perhaps you will consider something similar for your loved ones.

The following is an entry for my three-year old daughter.

Calleigh ~

You are a beautiful girl!

One of your favorite "Daddy-Daughter" games simply begins when you say, "Daddy, come get me!" It's kind of like Hide 'n Seek, without the hiding. Here's how the game plays out: You position yourself across the room, say the magic phrase, "Daddy, come get me!" and you anxiously wait for me to vault off the couch or floor or wherever I am at the time. Your eyes double in size as I track you down. Your squealing laughter rattles the room as I scoop you up in my arms. How could I possibly resist such an adorable invitation?!

Calleigh, I pray many things for you. One of them is that you will someday thrill at the thought of a Heavenly Father who lovingly pursues you. If you grew up to pray only one prayer, may it simply be, "Abba, Father, Daddy - come get me!"

As God lunges your direction, may the eyes of your heart double in size and your laughter rattle the heavens as you realize that God couldn't possibly resist chasing you.

Snackers... by Gary Taylor

2008-04-21 21:04:48 by Steve Wright



A fellow young parent asked me if my kids were good eaters. Unfortunately my kids were not good eaters, but they are great “snackers.”

Ya see, my kids - much like yours, I’m sure - when given the opportunity will continually raid the pantry throughout the day, snacking on Cheez-its, Spiderman gummies, marshmallows, suckers, Cocoa Puffs, etc...

As snacking gets carried away, they have no desire to eat a “real meal.”

It always amazed me when the kids would not want to eat an awesome dinner my wife prepared. I used to think, “What’s wrong with these kids??? Do they not realize what’s in front of them? This is great food!”

The problem wasn’t distaste for momma’s great cooking. Rather their problem was too strong of a desire for all the sweet things prior to that great meal. They temporarily satisfied themselves with a multitude of lesser things rather than disciplining themselves to hunger for the best and healthiest of things.

And then the real truth of the situation hit me like a ton of sugar and trans-fats... Sometimes I am not hungry for the things of God.

It’s not that I dislike God. The problem is that my appetite for God and His Word - the Greatest Meal - is diminished due to my incessant snacking on the lesser things so prevalent in the world. And I’ve passed these poor eating habits on to my kids.

So while my kids are under my roof, how do I shape their spiritual appetites? Do I clean out the pantry by sheltering them from everything the world offers? Such a reactionary response seems to be more like a religious sect than a grace-filled relationship. That may cause my kids eventually to binge on the things of this world when they get out on their own. The other extreme - looking the other way as they satisfy healthy longings through unhealthy means - would be to dismiss my God-given role of primary discipler of my children.

I personally see tremendous value in keeping “sweet snacks in the pantry” - activities like going to the amusement park with the kids, playing ball, watching a movie with my wife. But here’s the challenge I face: to limit the “snacking” in such a way that my family and I still have a healthy appetite for God.

I sense that this aspect of parenting will be a delicate balance - an art more than a science.

Go Fly a Kite... by Gary Taylor

2008-04-24 21:04:32 by Steve Wright



A kite-flying contest. As a second grader, I could hardly wait. We spent a few weeks making, decorating, and prepping our kites during our Cub Scout den meetings. Prizes were to be awarded for the most colorful kite, the kite with the longest tail, the kite that flies the highest, and other categories that would ensure that every participant “won.”

Finally the windy March day arrived when we’d launch our kites. I eyed the competition, quickly noting that I was assured a victory in the “longest tail” category. All I had to do was get my kite off the

ground, fly it for the designated length of time, and reel it safely back to earth.

Bob Seger would have been proud as I lifted my kite high overhead and began running against the wind. The brisk breeze filled the diamond-shaped paper stretched taut over the light wood frame.

And up it went.

I was pretty proud of that old kite. She bobbed back and forth as I continued unrolling the twine. Within minutes I realized that I very well could have the highest-flying kite, in addition to the one with the longest tail. Did I mention that I was proud of my kite???

In all my 8-year old glory I stood there dressed to the nines in my blue and yellow cub scout uni, sporting my canvas Chuck Taylor high-top Converse gym shoes, watching my kite rise higher and higher. And higher still.

Should I have added a flashing red light to my kite to warn oncoming planes? In addition to the demands of learning cursive as a second-grader, will I find the time to assist NASA in designing their next generation of space-worthy rockets? How will the Smithsonian choose to display my kite with such a long tail?

My competition languished far below my kite that day. And for good reason: I failed to hold on to the end of the twine!

And away it went.

As reality sunk in and my kite floated away, never to be seen again, I did what any tough boy scout would do. I ran to my parent’s car and started crying.

So which is more important... flying the kite, or anchoring it? I say, “yes.” It’s both. It really can’t fly without an anchor, the tension that counter-balances the wind.

Here’s another - far more critical - question: Which is more important... raising our kids, or being for them an anchor? Again I say, “yes.” We can’t truly say we are raising our kids if we are not fulfilling our God-given role as an anchor. As proud parents, we want to fly our kids high, showing off little Johnny’s athletic accomplishments and Susie’s report card. But are we anchoring them in the way God would have them to grow? Parenting is that delicate balance of providing a tension that counter-balances the contrary winds of temptation, peer pressure, and the natural sin nature each of our children inherits.

This illustration brings up an interesting point pertaining to discipling our children: I believe that it is DURING the high winds of adversity that we raise our kids to new heights, not in the absence of those troublesome winds.

This is God’s call on my life: provide an anchor for my kids while I lead the way, running against the wind.

Gospel-Centered Parenting... Gary Taylor

2008-05-08 18:05:19 by Steve Wright



Borrowing a C.S. Lewis analogy, let's say we could perform some razzle-dazzle magic and turn a dog into a cat. Would the "former dog" be a *better* animal as a cat, or would it be a *new* one? The obvious answer: a dog-turned-cat would be a NEW animal, not just "better." Everyone knows that a cat is not simply a "better dog." For example, a cat is not a dog that has learned to use a litter box; a cat is an entirely different animal.

And this has to do with parenting???

My wife and I attended a forum for parents entitled, "Gospel-Centered Discipline." We are far from perfect when it comes to parenting, but not doing a bad job. I don't mean to brag, but our oldest is five, and he has never been arrested. Similarly, my three-year old daughter doesn't get drunk and come home past her curfew. I think my wife and I are off to a good start as parents. We are "good parents" who long to be "better parents."

Steve Mizel, our church's Family Pastor, began the Friday night forum with the Gospel. Specifically, he talked about the Gospel and how it applied to *my* life as a parent. I squirmed and thought to myself, "*When is he gonna get to the part where I learn how to deal with a strong-willed child???* Does the Bible address the option of electric-shock therapy as healthy discipline???"

Steve was poignant as he declared the Gospel's two-pronged message: As a parent I am more broken and damaged than I could possibly imagine, yet I am loved by Jesus more than I could ever hope.

How do the Gospel and dogs-turned-cats apply to parenting???

Even if I become a better parent, my best will never be good enough. (I am more sinful than I know). BUT, I am also more loved than I can imagine. God's not interested in me being better - His unimaginable love can make me NEW! As a parent I need transformation beginning at the soul level, becoming a new creation in Christ. (1 Corinthians 5:17)

My kids need more than this old dog dad of theirs to clean up his act and learn a few tricks. This leads me to a humbling confession: my kids need a "new" dad. And because of the beauty of the Gospel, they may just get one.

Look in my Eyes... by Gary Taylor

2008-05-15 15:05:23 by Steve Wright



I called on my way home from work. My wife's tone said it all. She was being pushed to the proverbial edge by our son. Or, as she said that day, "YOUR son..."

I had a few minutes in the car to gather my thoughts. I recalled a friend telling us that eye contact helps a child that age to listen better. It made sense to me, so I was prepared to repeat the command - "Look at my eyes - each time his attention wavered. By the time I rolled into the garage I felt armed and ready.

Jack! Sit here at the kitchen table with your father. We must talk.

He smiled and took a seat. (Smiled? Did he not notice I used my deeper, don't-mess-with-me-because-I-am-the-Dad voice?)

Before beginning my earnest tirade, I instructed him to look me directly in the eye.

Jack leaned in close, our identical father-son blue eyes locked intently on one another. And, to my surprise, for the duration of my speech I never had to remind him to continue looking me in the eye.

As I continued my lecture - his eyes unwavering - I recall thinking to myself, Hey... this eye contact gig really works. I hope my wife is taking note.

As I concluded my speech with a summation of my three points and a poem, I asked Jack if he understood what daddy said.

Jack leaned in mere inches from my face, eyes still laser-locked on mine. I will never forget his three-word response:

"I see flowers." With a curious awe, he pointed to within a millimeter of my eye and repeated, "I see flowers."

What?! After my beautifully crafted speech, all you have to say is, "I see flowers"??? What's wrong with this kid?

Simultaneously my wife and I realized what happened: Jack was seated so close to me that he saw the flower centerpiece reflecting in my eyes.

I had to laugh. He heard nothing I said, but I have to give the boy due credit - he did a great job of looking in my eyes.

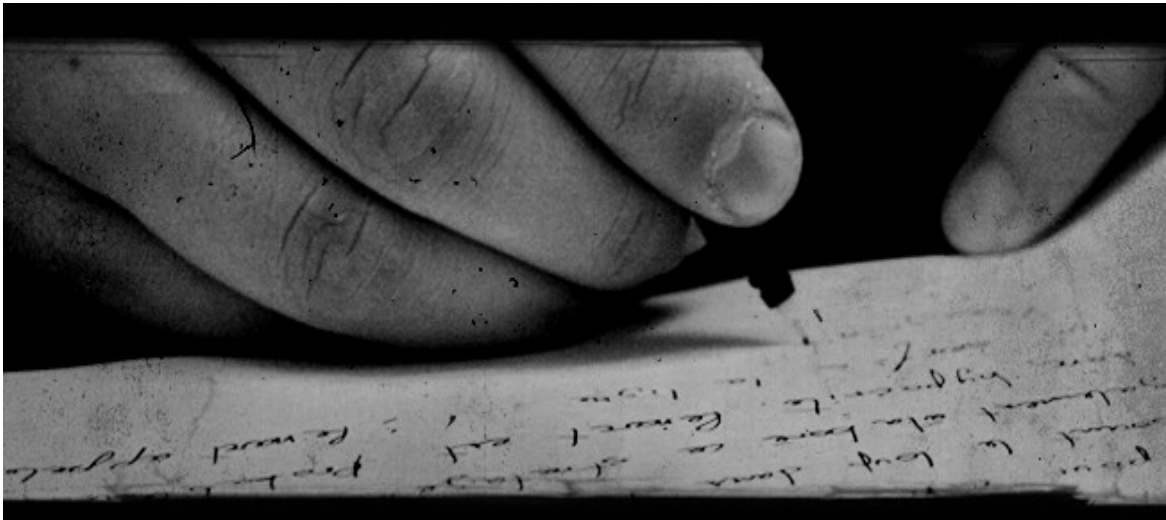
The moral of the story is perhaps too "Chicken-Soup-for-the-Soul": when we assume our God-appointed role of disciplinarian, what do our kids see when they look in our eyes?

It has been poetically overstated that, "the eyes are the window to the soul." What comes out of my mouth will always take a back seat to the picture of love and warmth - or selfish fury and frigidity - on display in my eyes.

Do we have the courage to ask our children what they see when they look in our eyes?

Out of the Mouths of Babes.... Gary Taylor

2008-06-03 12:06:51 by Steve Wright



I cannot over-encourage you to journal to your children. Here is a recent journal entry for my 5-year-old son, who will receive his journal at a significant, God-appointed time later in his life.

Sunday morning you and I arrived early at church to help with setting up for Kids Ministry. (FYI - Our family attends a "portable church," currently meeting at a nearby school). It was POURING rain, which meant we were gonna get drenched hauling in the stuff from the shed to the school.

As a couple of us adults complained about the weather, you interrupted by saying, "Why don't we pray and ask God to make it quit raining?" So, guess what we did?

After we circled up and prayed for the rain to cease, we headed downstairs where we looked out a window... to see that the rain had stopped.

Later that night as you and I lay in bed talking about the day, I mentioned how awesome it was that God answered our prayer for the rain to stop. Your response was very calm and matter-of-fact: "Dad," you said, "God is powerful, you know."

Jack, one reason I wrote this story in your journal is obvious: I am so proud of you and your heart that is sensitive to God. But there is another reason I wrote this for you...

There was this guy named John the Baptist who also had a tremendous heart for God. But he had this season of life in a prison cell when he needed a reminder that God is powerful. Elijah needed that same reminder from a depressed state in a cave. Your dad needed that reminder in this current season of uncertainty.

And most likely you, too, will someday find yourself in one of those unenviable crevices where life grows dark, the clouds gather, rain dumps...but know this: God is still powerful.
