


Baby Step #3

Be THE Teacher

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Hi! My name is Paul

“Hi! My name is Paul. I have six daughters.” Most of the time when people hear this they either think I’m Catholic or, the other extreme, a playboy who sowed his seed with total indiscretion. Neither is true. I am madly in love with the lovely and talented Mrs. Peterson, and together we have brought into this world six amazing ladies!

My experience with parenting goes like this... MOST of the time I like being “dad.” MOST of the time I love coming home. MOST of the time I enjoy those decades old jokes (you know, they’re the same ones you told your parents and now your kids are telling you and you have to act like you’ve never heard it AND that it is funny). MOST of the time I like hearing about their day. MOST of the time I like going out in public with all of these ladies. But there are days... you’ve had them too! Those days when you would prefer to act like those screaming kids belong to someone else so that you can make snide remarks and shoot condescending looks at those irresponsible and awful parents. Or better yet, those days when you can binge on Netflix and Doritos and act like you’re single with no responsibility. There are days when you simply cannot endure one more child initiated drama, and you swear to God that if you hear your nickname (DAD! MOM!) again you will simply change your name and move to another country. (Come on, you know you’ve felt this way too.)

Seriously, I love being a parent, but there are days when I just want to run away! There are days when I just want to quietly slip in the front door and right upstairs into my Mandom (aka Man Cave) ... a land where there is no tattling, arguing, or drama; a land where my rulings are unquestioned and my belongings left untouched. Do you know what I’m talking about? Some days we feel too tired, inadequate, distracted or frustrated to do what parenting requires of us! Welcome to parenting in the “First Half.”

I have learned some things that will help you enjoy the first half of parenting, which I define as starting at birth and ending around 10 years of age. This article will help you get started with the most important lesson about parenting young children! Enjoy, and always remember this, **“You’ve got this!”**

Me with the lovely and ever talented Mrs. Peterson!



Our six ladies!





First day of School

Remember your kiddo's first day of school? Backpacks, lunchboxes, new shoes, paper, tissues, new friends, and stories of teachers! Remember how they would come home, and still do, with stories of the people with whom they spend their day and from whom they learn? Teachers quickly become the key figures in many of their stories. Growing up and going through school, your child will have many teachers, but there is one that is different and more influential than any other teacher... you. You are *THE* teacher. **The lessons you teach will be more influential and last longer than anything they will learn from their teachers at school.**

One of my favorite quotes about family comes from Peter Scazzero in his book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. He writes, **"Numerous external forces may shape us, but the family we have grown up in is the primary and, except in rare instances, the most powerful system that will shape and influence who we are."** The environment you create and the lessons you teach will have the most impact on your children's lives!

It is the things I cannot outsource that I am responsible for teaching.

Now you might be freaking out right now so let me put you at ease; the things you will be teaching, while they may include numbers and letters, will not be limited to that.

If the numbers part of learning were up to my kids their future would be filled with promise... the promise of not having a clue! I am not a great numbers person, but that is okay because the lessons I will teach my kids, while they may include numbers, are so much more than numbers! **I am teaching my children about life.**

My job as a teacher is to teach my children how to live, laugh, and love (Somebody ought to put that line on a plaque). If I do not know how to teach numbers to my child, I can get a tutor. If I am unsure how to navigate the newest technology that they are learning that is okay too, I can find a YouTube video that will help them. If I do not know, I can outsource most of the things they will be taught in school. **It is the things I cannot outsource that I am responsible for teaching.** Things like attitude, respect, determination, responsibility, and mercy... the things that your children do not get a grade on but which everyone knows whether they are failing or passing. Those are the things that you are responsible for teaching!



Why do we go to school?

Let me ask you a question. Why do we go to school? You probably just said it in your head... “to learn”! Yep! That is why we go to school... so we can learn.

Well then, why do we need to learn? Right now, you are probably wondering where I am going... hang in there! **We go to school to learn.** We need to learn because we do not know, and if we continue, “not knowing” we will plateau rather than mature. We will not last economically, physically, emotionally, professionally, or spiritually in this world! We must know to succeed, and to know we must learn, and that is why we go to school and have teachers.



The surprise in your kid's heart

When I was reading the book of Proverbs, seeking wisdom for parents, I came across a sentence that helped me understand my kids and this matter of learning – **“A youngster’s heart is filled with foolishness.”** (Proverbs 22:15).

Now before I completely agreed with that I wanted to make sure I knew what “foolishness” was, so I looked it up in the dictionary: “Foolishness – a lack of good sense or judgment; stupidity.” Hey now! That is it! I have definitely seen that attribute in my kids... and you have seen it in yours too! They may be beautiful but WOW can they ever make some bad decisions (aka: lacking in good sense or judgment; stupid)!

Now you may not like what I am saying and it might sound a little harsh but think about it... how many kids do you know that came into this world with good sense, mature judgment, and a propensity to make wise decisions? N-O-N-E. Z-E-R-O! Those children do not exist!

As a Christian, my beliefs are guided by what the Bible says, and on this one, my experience confirms what the Bible teaches...*kids come into this world with hearts filled with foolishness!*

Most kids, if given the choice, would have a diet of candy, would wear the same clothes for days, would make minimal efforts in the area of personal hygiene, and would consistently demonstrate the lovely and endearing values of: selfishness, dishonesty, anger, and a lack of self-control among other things... all foolishness!

It is what is in our hearts, and it will stay there until something happens.

Unfortunately, this explains a lot of adult behavior. **Many adults are just children who can go to the bathroom on their own.** They are all grown up on the outside, but the inside is still filled with foolishness, just like a child, because nothing ever happened.

So what is it that needs to happen to children (and adults) for that inherent foolishness to be displaced? Remember the sentence that started this whole conversation? “A youngster’s heart is filled with foolishness.” That’s the first part of a thought that Solomon, the author of this proverb, was teaching. The whole thought goes like this, **“A youngster’s heart is filled with foolishness, but discipline will drive it away.”** (Proverbs 22:15). “Discipline”! Discipline drives away foolishness?! Again, just to be sure I knew what Solomon was saying, I checked the dictionary: **“Discipline – training to act in accordance with rules.”** Training! Teaching! That is it! That is what needs to happen for and to our children to drive out the foolishness that is inherently in their hearts.

It is possible to be an adult with a heart filled with foolishness!

Parents, this is our job... our responsibility... to teach our children to do what they would not instinctively do. What they would instinctively do is, more often than not, foolish... because “a youngster’s heart is filled with foolishness.” Think about this - no child knows how to do addition... until he/she is taught. No child knows how to read... until he/she is taught. Likewise, no child knows how to handle conflict in a healthy way... until he/she is taught, and no child knows how to share... until he/she is taught.

Schoolteachers teach lessons that will set our children up for success in future. They teach things like reading, writing, computer, etc. Parent teachers also teach lessons that will set a child up for success in the future. They teach things like a work ethic, patience, how to make friends, how to worship God, delayed gratification, etc. Dad and mom, the lessons we teach will determine, in large part, the kind of adult our child will become. **It is possible for your child to grow up on the outside and still have the heart of a child... a heart filled with foolishness.** The lessons you teach, the discipline you engage in, will be instrumental in shaping their future! Take this seriously!

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PARENT TEACHER

Reading Proverbs I saw that there were at least three characteristics of an effective Parent Teacher, and since that is one of our primary roles, we need to make sure we get this right! Here they are content, consistency, character. Let’s flesh these out.

Content

Content is “**what**” you teach your children. As I read Proverbs, I noticed that Solomon had a handful of themes to which he kept coming back: sex, money, friends, and wisdom to name a few. As I read Solomon’s instruction to his son, I began to think about the things my dad always said to me:

- Your rights end where mine begin.
- I am not going to let you tear this home apart. (I heard this a lot when I was playing the role of the rebellious teenage boy.)
- Sometimes I am sorry isn’t enough
- You need to know a trade.
- Do not get your eyes on people; they will disappoint you.

In our home, with six daughters, we talk about boys... a lot. I make it a point to talk regularly about the three characteristics they should look for when they begin dating:

- *He must honor God.* This is about humility and strength. He needs to know he is not the biggest guy in the room. There is always someone bigger. This awareness leads to humility. Honoring God also leads to strength. Remember this line, “If God is for me, who can stand against me”?
- *He must have a job.* This is about responsibility. Do not expect to date my daughter if you are still living in your mom’s basement and expecting her to cover the cost of your dates... or worse yet... have my daughter pay your way while you sleep and play all day. If you want to date and potentially have my daughter as your wife, you must be capable of providing for and protecting her. (Of course, this is a bit different for a young teenager... but you get my point.)
- *He must treat her with respect.* This is about knowing her value. She is highly valued by her father and her God. We will expect nothing less than that from you, sir.



We talk about these three often enough that every time I start the conversation my girls say, **“We know Dad... *you always say that.*”** YES!!! That is exactly what I want! I want them to know it before I say it!

Another line that we regularly use around our house is in regards to money, “Earn it, give it, save it, spend it.” We have said it enough now that every time I start to say it the girls will say, “We know dad” and finish the sentence! That is what I want! I want to give them a handful of lessons that they know well and that shape the rest of their lives. I want to teach them lessons that will help them make wise choices so that they do not make the foolish choices that so many adults are making today in the areas of money, sex, relationships, work, God, etc.

Solomon apparently felt the same way. He wrote to his son, “Pay attention, my child, to what I say. Listen carefully. Do not lose sight of my words. Let them penetrate deep within your heart, for they bring life and radiant health to anyone who discovers their meaning” (Proverbs 4:20-22). My job as a parent is to teach my children content that will bring **“life and radiant health”** to them as they apply what they have learned from me. That is my job. I am *the* teacher.

If we were sitting down together having this conversation over a cup of coffee, I would stop... put my coffee down... lean forward and ask you, **“What will your kids say you always said?”** The answer to that question is the content you are teaching them. Are you happy with that? If you are, then slap me a high five!

If you are not, then it is time to start generating new content. A great way to get started on that is to read our e-book, Baby Step #2 – Create a GREAT Environment.

Teach your children what you want them to do and be! Put your ideas into memorable phrases... create your own proverbs. If you can’t that’s fine because there are plenty of memorable lines available to you to use as teaching tools!

Go find some... or make some up... and teach them to your kids! The things you always say... that is the content of your teaching.

Consistency

Good content delivered consistently over time is a game changer for kids! Consistent! This is the second characteristic of a good teacher. After about a decade into the parenting game I realized that to be an effective parent you must have the ability to say the same thing over and over and over and over and over and not quit. We just talked about the things your mom “always said.” Do you know why she always said those things? BECAUSE YOU DID NOT GET IT THE FIRST TIME! That is why we say the same thing over and repeatedly to our kids... BECAUSE THEY DO NOT GET IT THE FIRST TIME! That is why we “always” say it! Now there are some things you do not need to say more than once:

- Do not touch the hot stove again.
- Do not stick your finger in the socket again.
- Do not carry all of your money in your wallet at the mall.

Pain has a way of teaching us quickly, but **many important lessons are not reinforced with immediate pain.** Some lessons take longer to learn and that is why we must be consistently teaching our children the content we want them to know!

It's hard to be consistent! Can I get a witness?

Now here is the thing about being consistent... IT IS HARD! Do you ever think to yourself, "Why don't they get this? I've said it a million times?" I swear I have told my girls a million times to put their dirty clothes in the laundry room, but every night... (You know what happens right?). The easy thing to do is to roll my eyes, mutter under my breath, pick that shirt up and escort it to the laundry room... complaining about my kids the whole way down the stairs. That is the easy thing, and it is the wrong thing! **Doing for them what I am teaching them to do for themselves is both inconsistent and destructive!** If I do it for them, I am teaching them that... I will do it for them!

If Solomon had to repeat himself, I suppose it is okay if I have too.

Sometimes I wonder, “Do other parents have to say the same thing over and over and over?” I was relieved when I read through Proverbs and saw that Solomon said, “LISTEN!” at least fourteen times in this thirty-one chapter book. Very possibly the wisest man ever to live had to keep reminding his kids to listen! For instance, he said, “My children, listen to me. Listen to your father’s instruction. Pay attention and grow wise, for I am giving you good guidance. Don’t turn away from my teaching” (Proverbs 4:1-2). I swear I have said almost the same thing... maybe not as nice but close to the same thing! If Solomon had to repeat himself, I suppose it is okay if I have too.

Remember the question we pondered when we were talking about content? “*What* will your child say you always said?” What are the lessons you are teaching your child? What do you want them to know, do, and be? That is content. The question we have to ponder now is, “What will your child say you *always* said?” “Always” ... that is consistency. Good parents say good things over and over and over and over and then one day... their kids get it! Dad and mom, do not be discouraged! Keep teaching the good content you are teaching! Do not stop just because they do not get it now... someday they will.

So far, we have covered two of the three characteristics of an effective Parent Teacher: content and consistency. There is a third, and if you neglect this third characteristic, it will not matter *what* you *always* say... you will be ineffective. It is this thing called character.

Character

I think that the worst thing I can imagine my children saying, when they are grown, is “Dad always said, ‘Fear won’t keep me here because I have courage’, but he never really lived like that.”

Fill in your own blank: “Dad (or mom) always said, ‘_____’ but he really didn’t do it himself.” The thought of my children saying “He always said... but rarely did” or “He always talked about... but never did” makes me snap to attention!

I don’t want there to be a disparity between what I say and what I do, because if there is any difference between what I say and what I do my kids will see it... and what I do will always be more influential than what I say. In other words, ***my character will do more to shape my children than the content of my teaching.***

What you do will always be more important than what you say.

If I say, “Pick up your clothes” but I constantly leave my dirty socks laying around the house... guess what they are going to believe and do? If I say, “Spend your money wisely” but I constantly spend money I do not have on things I do not need... guess what they are going to believe and do. If I say, “Respect authority” but I constantly disregard and speak disrespectfully of my leaders (politicians included) ... guess what they are going to believe and do! I believe it was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, “Your actions speak so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.” **Dad and mom, what you do will always be more important and more influential than what you say.**

Consider this, what would happen if what you say and what you do were the same thing? What if you taught your kids to resolve conflict by first addressing the person with whom you have the problem... and then you did that when you had conflict! What if you taught your kids the value of eating healthy and exercising... and then you ate healthy! What if you taught your kids that reading was good... and then you read! What if you did what you teach?

Here is what would happen... you children would not only know *what* to do but also *how* to do it! They would know what to do (content) because you told them over and over and over and over (consistency), and they would know how to do it because they watched you do it (character).

The greatest teaching tool we have is our self.



A few years ago, I was sitting on our back deck, early in the morning, reading my Bible. As I read, I realized that a sleepy eyed princess, complete with her bed-head crown and princess pajamas, had joined me. Then I realized something else... she had a book in her hand too. She was doing what I was doing! At first I thought, “How cute!” So I snapped a picture. Then I realized what was happening... she was imitating me... and then I said a prayer, **“Dear God, help me to live a life that’s worth imitating.”**

Dad and mom we are *the* teacher in our children’s lives and the greatest teaching tool we have is ourselves. The lives we live will significantly shape the lives they live. My hope for Sherri and myself is that someday our kids will say, “Dad and mom always said ...” and that there will not be any disconnect between what we said and what we did. I hope that for you too!

“Do I want my children to be like me?”

The fundamental question that every Parent Teacher must answer is this, *“Do I want my children to be like me?”* Of course, there will be personality differences, but I mean in the fundamentals... do you want your children to be like you with how they interact with God, how they treat people, how they handle money, how they deal with conflict, how they set goals, how they handle power, how they interact with their spouse, and on and on and on. **Will you be happy if your children become an adult like you?** You know what? It is highly likely that your kids will be... just like you.

Good content consistently presented with integrity of character is what the most effective teachers do, and it is what you can and must do as the Parent Teacher who is preparing your child to be an adult!

One more thing...

As I wrap up this chapter, I need to tell you this: **sometimes Parent Teachers make mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes are matters of content; usually they are matters of character.** It is not that you are saying the wrong things; it is just that you are not doing what you are saying. *If there is a disconnect between what you are saying and doing your kids will see it... and point it out:*

- But dad says it...
- But you watch it...
- But you eat it...
- But you do it...

As adults, we call this “**hypocrisy.**” Take heart, every parent has done this and been caught by his ever alert seven-year old! If this happens repeatedly, you may have a character problem, and that is something that needs to be prayerfully and thoughtfully corrected. If it is a once off mistake, then I encourage you to admit it. Tell your child that you did what you tell her not to do. Ask her forgiveness and tell her that together you two are going to work on not doing that anymore! You will be surprised at the incredible little accountability partner you create!

My point is this, **do not be too good to ask their forgiveness when you mess up.**

You will be showing them how to deal with mistakes and giving them an opportunity to extend grace at the same time. Remember, you are not perfect and neither are your kids, but you are working every single day to get better, and saying “I’m sorry” is a great first step towards “better.”



You've got this!

You have this Dad! You can do this Mom! Content, Consistency, and Character... these are the three tools that great teachers use to shape productive and successful lives!

In this e-book, we have discussed how to be THE Teacher in your child's life; in our next e-book will discuss **"Baby Step #4 – Get a Ph.D. in Your Child."** Sherri and I can't wait to share that with you!

Until then...**You can do this! You've got this!**

FIRST

half parenting

You can find out more about Paul on his social media:



[Instagram.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.instagram.com/thepaulpeterson)



[Facebook.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.facebook.com/thepaulpeterson)



“The better you are, the better your kids will be!”

Paul Peterson

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