




# Baby Step #4

## Get a Ph.D. in Your Child

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# Hi! My name is Paul

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“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!



# My Ph.D. experience #nope

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When I graduated from seminary, I considered working towards a Ph.D. in theology. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is the highest degree offered by universities. Someone who has a Ph.D. is considered an expert in his or her area of study. As I began to explore what the next 4-6 years of study would look like my enthusiasm began to leak. The more I dug into this possible venture the more I realized, these people are hyper-focused experts on one thing... and I like bouncing around (some might call that ADHD). If I were to get the Ph.D. that would mean that I would spend the next 4-6 years of my life focusing on one topic. I would need to become intimately familiar with all of the ins and outs of that topic and possess a knowledge about that topic that was paralleled by few others. I would be an expert in one thing because I decided to give it all of my focus. That did not sound good to me, so I decided not to pursue the Ph.D. and instead, did some other graduate work in the area of leadership. Then we had kids.

At first, it was crazy and fun. Not too much was required beyond long hours and extensive interaction with bodily fluids. Then they started getting older, and personalities began to become obvious. Then we had more children, and I realized they are like snowflakes... no two are alike. What engaged one child was boring to another. What helped one child discouraged the other. What made one child laugh was not even noticed by the other.

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## **“What used to entertain them now embarrasses them. They changed.”**

At first, it was crazy and fun. Not too much was required beyond long hours and extensive interaction with bodily fluids. Then they started getting older, and personalities began to become obvious. Then we had more children, and I realized they are like snowflakes... no two are alike. What engaged one child was boring to another. What helped one child discouraged the other. What made one child laugh was not even noticed by the other.

Now I am a guy who likes to bounce around... a little here... a little there. Sit a bit... run a bit... read this... write that... a little attention here... a little attention there. Now I have all of these children... and they are all different... and I really want to be a good dad to them... but I do not have a clue how because they are all so different! When they are little, they do not require much: “feed me, burp me, clean me, make me laugh, and put me to sleep.” Really, that is pretty easy. Then they get older and what used to work no longer works.

I remember when I realized that the game was about to change; it was when silly noises and tickling no longer engaged them. When my girls were little, it was enough to roll around the floor making silly noises and tickling bellies. Now we are working on schoolwork, learning about social media, playing with guinea pigs, shopping for makeup, and talking about boys. If I were to make a silly noise and make a move for their belly that would result in a stern look and a short lecture that ended in the words, “Now don’t embarrass me dad.” **What used to entertain them now embarrasses them. They changed.**

# They Changed

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They changed, and here is the thing... they did not all change alike! Each one of them is developing into a unique person with a unique blend of interests, passions, skills, inclinations, likes and dislikes. Initially it did not take much to know my child. The older they get, the more effort is required to know them. It is important to know your child because, **the more you know about your child the more likely you are to be a good parent and teacher for them.**

Now we are back to that Ph.D. thing. Just a few sentences ago I wrote, “To get a Ph.D. I would need to become intimately familiar with all of the ins and outs of that topic, and possess a knowledge about that topic that was paralleled by few others. I would be an expert in one thing because I decided to give it all of my focus.” As my children get older I realize that the focus necessary to get a Ph.D. in academics is the same intense focus necessary become an expert in your child and be a great parent!



# The Proverb for Parents

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There is a proverb for parents that most of us have heard at some time or another. It goes like this, “Train up a child in the **way** he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 KJV). The word “way” is what is most relevant in this conversation.

Every child has a “way.” Every child becomes an adult who has his/her “way.” I have my way of dealing with stress and you have yours. I have my way to work and you have yours. I have my way of sleeping and you have yours. We each have a “way.” Good parents do the hard work of finding their children’s “way” and helping them live that way the best way.

One of my favorite teachers is Chuck Swindoll. He wrote a book about parenting called *Parenting: From Surviving to Thriving*. In this book, he discusses the proverb we are talking about and gives some insight that will take your breath away. He says:

“We receive our children from the hand of God, not as soft, pliable lumps of clay, ready to be molded into whatever we think they should become.

Each child comes with a set of abilities, intellectual capacity, and a way of perceiving and thinking, all of which were endowed by God. We can surely influence and even mold them to a certain extent, but our efforts have limits.

On the one hand, if parents ignore or discourage a talent, it may never emerge.

On the other hand, if parents cultivate a talent, it will likely become a part of the child.”

Did you catch all of that? Do you need to read it again? Go ahead... read it again.

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## **“...one size does not fit all... unless it is a Snuggie.”**

“Each child comes with a set of abilities, intellectual capacity, and a way of perceiving and thinking”, and if you don’t make an effort to discern and know their “way”, you will likely miss it and they will very likely miss becoming the person they were created to be! **Parents who do not take the time to become experts on their children by knowing their “way” will likely parent with a “one-size-fits-all” approach.** In other words, they treat every child the same. They interact with every child the same way, and they have the same expectations of every child. “One-size-fits-all” parenting is easier and requires less energy, but it is guaranteed to be wrong because we all know that one size does not fit all... unless it is a Snuggie.

You know this, we are not alike and neither are kids! Some people are savers and others are spenders. Some people are introverts and others extroverts. Some people enjoy creating while others enjoy counting. Some like mornings and others like nights! One size does not fit all, and parents, we have to recognize this when it comes to our kids or we are going to discourage and destroy them!

I have seen kids with lots of potential whose parents never helped them discover their “way”; as a result, they grew up to be frustrated adults with frustrated parents. Swindoll says, “if parents ignore or discourage a talent, it may never emerge. On the other hand, if parents cultivate a talent, it will likely become a part of the child.” This is what it means to have a Ph.D. in your child! You know their way, interact with them accordingly and set them up to become all that they have the potential to become!

# Figure Out Your Child's "Way"

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Solomon, the legendary wise man, wrote another proverb for parents that answers this question: "Even children are known by **the way** they act, whether their conduct is pure, and whether it is right. Ears to hear and eyes to see— both are gifts from the LORD" (Proverbs 20:11-12 NLT).

Did you see that? You know your child's "way" by observing the way they act! Your child is telling you every day what her way is! Every day he is sending you signals that tell you what his "way" is! Your job, dad and mom, is to pay attention to those signals!

I love what Solomon did in that proverb. He said that a child's "way" is revealed through his actions. Then he immediately said, "Ears to hear and eyes to see— both are gifts from the LORD."

I like to think that he was still talking to parents here. He is saying, "Your children are showing you their 'way'... now listen and watch so you can learn it and parent them accordingly!" This is what a Ph.D. does... he becomes an expert on his subject through extensive observation and inquiry. This practice of observing and inquiring makes experts in the university... and in the home!

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Chuck Swindoll again has some helpful remarks on this subject:

**“Your children are making themselves known every day. Do not drift. Do not let your senses get dull. Do not ignore what you are hearing and seeing.**

**Pay attention to your children while they are at play. Carefully observe what they do, how they do things, and what they enjoy. Those are eloquent clues, frequently repeated. So pay attention!**

**When you see your children do things well, encourage and affirm them.**

**If children clearly enjoy particular kinds of activities, provide more opportunity to explore them. And as children experiment, give them plenty of room to fail and try something else without a single word of condemnation and without calling attention to the mess or criticizing the expense.”**



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## Watch for “aggravating greatness.”

A few years ago, I had an insight about kids that I have since referred to as “**aggravating greatness.**” This insight came from two stories in the Bible. You may not be a person of faith, but I think these stories will prove helpful for you anyhow. The first is a story about a young man named Joseph (you can read it in Genesis 37). As a boy, Joseph had dreams of greatness. He literally had dreams about being the most powerful person in the room! In these dreams, his brothers (all eleven of them) were bowing down to him... and so were his parents! He shared these dreams in an inappropriate and offensive way, and ticked off his entire family!

What happens next is important. As his dad was talking to him about his arrogance and chiding him for aggravating his brothers “**he kept these things in mind**” (Genesis 37:11). Jacob (the dad) saw something more than a kid foolishly, arrogantly spewing a dream of greatness. **He saw a seed of greatness through the fog of immaturity.** He had a “parenting moment.” Even while his son was saying and doing things that were annoying, Jacob saw and heard something that gave him some insight into Joseph’s “way.” He “kept those things in mind” as he reflected on how to best parent him. If you are familiar with the story, you know that Joseph did eventually become the most powerful man in the room and that his brothers and father did eventually bow down to him!

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The second story is about Jesus when he was a boy (you can read about it in the biography of Jesus written by Luke - 2:41-52). Every year Jewish families would head to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Jesus' parents were no exception. After this particular festival, they headed home but were separated in the massive flow of traffic headed out of the city. His parents, Joseph and Mary, did not worry too much when they did not see Jesus. They just assumed he was traveling with some friends. After a while of traveling and still having not seen him, they got worried. That is what we all do when our twelve year old is missing... at first, we do not worry too much... then we begin to freak out! They headed back into the city and searched for three days looking for their pre-teen! They found him in the Temple deeply engaged with teachers and theological scholars! At age twelve, Jesus should have been in over his head with the kinds of theological conversations he was having with the leading theologians of the day. He was not. In fact, the scholars he was in conversation with were "amazed at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46).

It turns out that he had skipped out on the family trip back home from Jerusalem in order to engage in these theological discussions. His parents were... well, let us just say "concerned." When they finally found him in the temple engaged in deep conversation, they chided him for not staying with them, but his mom, Mary, had a "parenting moment." **She saw a seed of greatness through the fog of "immaturity"**. In the midst of all of this chaos she *"treasured all these things in her heart"* (Luke 2:51). If you do not know the rest of the story, Jesus would later become the key player in every theological discussion. Not only did he understand theology... he was theology!

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When Joseph was being annoying and coming off as arrogant his father, Jacob, had a parenting moment and “kept these things in mind.” When Jesus acted irresponsibly and scared his parents to death, his mom, Mary, had a parenting moment and “treasured all these things in her heart.”

Both Jacob and Mary saw the seed of greatness in their child at their point of greatest frustration with their child. There is an important lesson here, and one that every Ph.D. must be aware of: **The clue to your child’s greatness might present itself when they are aggravating you the most.** In other words, clues to your child’s “way” might be discovered when they are aggravating you the most!

Now sometimes when they are aggravating it might just be because they are tired, hungry, or just plain being ornery. However, sometimes there is a clue to their way! You may not always get the clue or get the whole picture in the moment. Neither Jacob nor Mary necessarily connected the dots completely in the moment. They just made a mental note: “Hmmm... Joseph had a dream of greatness and was not scared to share it. I wonder...” “Hmmm... Jesus really had the attention of his elders when he was talking about theology. I wonder....”

Both Jacob and Mary did what Solomon said great parents who discover their kid’s “way” will do, **they used their eyes and ears to observe and determine their kid’s way!** They observed, engaged, and made edits to their parenting philosophy based on what they saw as their child’s “way.”

# Two Important Thoughts

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As I read those stories, a couple of thoughts come to mind:

***When my kids are irritating me the most, a clue to their greatness may be in the fog of aggravation.*** Do not be so angry in the moment that you miss the moment. Take a breath. Get a clue. Make a mental note. Process that note and other observations you may have made, when you are not so hot!

A second thought is helpful too: ***your ability to connect the dots from “moment” to “moment” will play a HUGE role in determining how well your children live out their potential greatness.*** You do not have to “get it” all at once. What you do have to do is keep noticing little clues that your kids leave along the way. As you put those clues together, you will see their “way” and be able to engage with them accordingly.

I want to be honest with you. Getting a Ph.D. takes time... a lot of time. Getting a Ph.D. in your child takes *more* time. Studying your child requires attention, so it is going to be hard to do with your phone in one hand and the remote in the other. You are a student in a high demand classroom. The effort you make will determine the kind of parent you are and the kind of adult your child becomes. You can do this! You have to do this! Let me give you a couple of ideas how to get it done.



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## **“Life is busy, but parenting is important.”**

I am a busy man. I live with one wife and six daughters. Additionally, I am a pastor, a personal trainer, and I am working on some writing projects. ***Life is busy... but parenting is important!***

If I want to be a great parent and have great adult children, I must invest time now. That is how you become an expert, a Ph.D.; spend time studying your subject! The best way for me to spend time with my children, especially with so many, is to schedule dates. I date each daughter every week. We have a time and money budget; at this point in our life, it is \$1 and 30-60 minutes a week. You would be surprised at how much can happen in that hour! Here are some examples:

- A Jr. Frosty from Wendy's (\$.89) and a game of memory.
- Truth or Dare while you're eating that frosty from Wendy's (there was a time I had to do a split in the restaurant! #awkward).
- A “car party”! This is where you turn the music up and ride around singing at the top of your lungs. Oh, you would be surprised how much you learn about your child between songs... They talk then!
- Pick some toys and go to a quiet place and play! Get on the ground with them... see what they see!
- Make videos. Maybe post them to social media... maybe not... but make videos.
- Go swing in the park.
- Go to a flower garden.
- Go to the Dollar Store.

The list goes on and on but you get the idea. The key here is to **listen** to what they want to do, then **watch**, and **listen** while you do it with them! **You will see clues to your child's “way” along the way!**

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## You are a historian and prophet in your child's life.

Being an expert in your child requires that you are always listening and watching. You will pick up clues when they are aggravating you. You will see hints of their “way” when you are spending time with them. You will not always understand what you hear or see, but follow the lead of Jacob and Mary. Think about what you have seen, connect the dots to other habits, actions, friend choices, interests, etc. that you see in your child. It will not be long until you have discovered her “way” and you will be well on your way to having a Ph.D. in your child!

I want to tell you one more thing before we wrap up this chapter. A few years ago, I read a wonderful book by Mark Batterson called *Praying Circles Around Your Children*. He said that we, as parents, are “historians and prophets” in our children’s lives. **As historians, we know his or her past better than anyone does.** We are eyewitnesses to the events that happened in their life from the very first moments! **As prophets, we have the opportunity and responsibility to speak bold and clear vision about their future based on what we see in the present.** As we reflect on our children’s history, understand their “way” and speak to them about their future we will set them up for success and a deeply fulfilling life. That is what having a Ph.D. in your child will do for them, and by the way, it is hugely gratifying for you too!



# You've got this!

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Earning a Ph.D. takes a HUGE amount of time, money, energy, and attention... but in the end you will be an expert. We believe that it is not only important, but fulfilling to do the work necessary to earn a Ph.D. in your child... and for that reason we are cheering for you!!! You have this Dad! You can do this Mom!

As you become an expert in your child's "way", you will need to adjust and guide along the way. You will need to discipline them and teach them discipline, and that is what our next e-book is all about - **"Baby Step #5 – Discipline Effectively"** 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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