

Five-year-old Bryan stomped across the deck, reached for the doorknob, then issued an ear-splitting yell when the door failed to respond. Pudgy fists pounded the door. A verbal assault, far beyond his years, followed. The abusive language was not aimed at the locked door, but rather at the woman inside—his mother.

This display of anger and disrespect from one so young was shocking. But Bryan was only patterning the language and emotions he observed every day. Bryan was behaving just like his daddy.

Children learn by watching and listening. Teens especially look to see if our walk models our talk. If we are intentional about wanting our children to be followers of Christ, we must lead the way. It is our responsibility to set the example.

Speech

I remember the day my two-year-old son brought the power of role modeling clearly into view. Strapped in his carseat, he observed a vehicle's abrupt lane change in front of us. Before I could say what was on the tip of my tongue, a bold little voice

Service

During the last four years, Tom has taken summer mission trips to Brazil to help construct churches. During the last three years, he's taken one of his children with him to share the experience.

Karen remembers her mother setting extra places at their Thanksgiving dinner table for the homeless, the widowed, and for college students. Today her house is open to those in need. Her son recently completed a summer internship constructing houses for low-income families.

Ken remembers regular visits to the nursing home as a child with his parents. Today he leads a group of volunteers who sing to shut-ins and nursing home residents once a week.

Actions

Are we allowing anger or selfishness to control our actions? Slammed doors, the silent treatment, exasperated sighs, and raised voices over inconsequential issues teach our children to act out impatience and anger. Proverbs 14:29 reminds us, "A patient man has great understanding, but a

Modeling the Walk

By Candy Arrington

pipled, "That jerk!" *How awful*, I thought. *Where did he learn that?* The answer came quickly—from me. I recalled James 3:9: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness."

Just as children learn verbal communication from their parents, they also mimic the emotions and thoughts behind our speech. If children hear negativity, criticism, pride, and self-elevation, their speech will follow suit.

If you catch yourself saying something you wish you had not said, acknowledge your regret. Say, "I wasn't being nice when I said that. I'm sorry, and I'm going to pray for a more compassionate, less judgmental spirit."

If profanity or name calling is a problem in your family, try requiring each family member to deposit a quarter in a jar every time an inappropriate word is spoken. Sometimes, just becoming aware of how often we use inappropriate language is enough to slow or halt the process. Speak blessings rather than curses. Speak words of encouragement and affirmation. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6, *NKJV*).

quick-tempered man displays folly."

We all struggle with the problem of self—self-absorption, self-will, self-control, self-discipline. Getting a grip on self means daily surrender to Christ's lordship. Teach your children to make Christ the center of their lives by modeling this in your own life. Allow your actions to overflow from your identity in him. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Spiritual Discipline

Don't expect your children to do something you're not doing. If you encourage them to have a daily quiet time but they never see you engage in Bible reading and prayer, then they will most probably follow your example. Talk less and show more. When your children see you reading your Bible

or writing in a prayer journal, they'll be more likely to follow suit.

Engage in spiritual conversation with your children. Tell them what the Lord is teaching you and ask them to tell you what he is doing in their lives. Be honest. If you've neglected your quiet time for several weeks, ask your children to hold you

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accountable. Ask them if you can remind them as well. Mutual accountability places you on a spiritual peer level with your children. Don't be too proud to learn from your children. If you can connect on a spiritual level, it will go a long way toward diffusing problems and conflicts about other issues.

Set a prayer example. Philippians 4:6, 7 reminds us to pray about everything with the added promise of peace for those who make prayer a priority. Model prayer as the first response to life's problems. Show your children prayer is appropriate for matters both great and small.

View worship as an expectation, not an option. Some families approach Sunday with a we'll-see-how-we-feel-when-we-get-up attitude. No effort is made to prepare the night before. Clocks are not set. Clothes are not ironed. Everyone rises haphazardly and waits for someone else to make the decision.

Such careless attitudes practically guarantee the family will not make it to church on time, if at all. Parents need to set the pace and make the announcement the night before—for all to hear—that church attendance is expected.

Teens can often whine their way out of events they are not enthusiastic about. Church shouldn't be one of those. Don't give in to the line that they can't get ready on time. Teens can make it to school on time when penalties loom, or arrive promptly to other activities when there will be a special someone present. Set the standard that church attendance is a given, not an option.

Forgiveness

John and Carrie stood on the threshold of divorce. Twenty years of unmet needs, undiscussed offenses, and unreconciled emotions clouded their past and blocked their future. Anger and bitterness entwined their spirits like creeping vines. Their situation seemed hopeless until one day, in a moment of tenderness, they put pride and pain aside and uttered three simple words to each other

that revolutionized their marriage—*I forgive you.*

Many of us find it almost impossible to forgive those who have wronged us. Unwillingness to forgive damages relationships, creates bitterness, and affects our connection to God. Are you modeling forgiveness for your children? Often an unwillingness to forgive becomes a form of generational bondage passed on to children and grandchildren.

Forgiving involves the will to forgive, even when our feelings aren't there to back up our actions. Show your children how to forgive others in the spirit of Christ.

Love

Ginny's rebellion took many forms. She ignored her parents' counsel, chose a lifestyle outside the bounds of her upbringing, and rejected God and her family. However, when depression overwhelmed her, the first person she called was her mother. Her mother listened with compassion and prayed with her, wrapping her in a word-blanket of love.

Create an atmosphere in your home that says, "I love you for who you are, not what you do." If God's love for us depended on our righteousness, we would fail miserably. Jesus showed us how to love one another. It is our responsibility as parents to model his love before our children. "He who covers over an offense promotes love" (Proverbs 17:9).

In Deuteronomy 11:18, 19, God commands, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds . . . Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul wrote, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Your children are going to follow someone. Let that someone be you. Teach them to follow you as you follow Christ, and soon they will become spiritual leaders, leading others to follow Christ. ■

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