

Five Reasons Being a Dad is Awesome

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! (Psalm 127:3-5)

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, wrote those words. I happen to agree with him completely and not just because I believe God inspired his words. I've lived them out and seen those words proved true in my own life. ***I am a father.*** Very few sentences I can conjure make me happier than that one.

I love being a dad. I've [written](#) about being a dad before for Rambling Ever On. If you have paid any attention to those [articles](#), you will already know that I have three boys. (It's okay if you haven't paid attention. One of my boys never reads anything I write.) My oldest is 15. My youngest is 9. The middle child – my kindred spirit since I too am a middle child – just turned 14. I cannot imagine my life without my boys. I really can't. I don't want to think about how boring everything would be if I didn't have kids. I've learned a lot about the world since I became a father. I've learned a lot more about myself. Here are five of the biggest reasons being a dad has been so amazing.

Being a dad helped me appreciate home.

The Lytles are homebodies. We make no excuses for that either. We love being with our family in our home. We probably

confound some people in that we are willing to sacrifice doing things or going places simply to be home with each other. We've not allowed our boys to participate in good things because we value our time together as a family. I realize that is probably somewhat countercultural. I'm okay with that. It's a parenting/marriage philosophy that we have developed over time. I'm not a social butterfly, by any means, but before we had kids we did stuff. We really did! We went out. We went to movies. I've attended dozens and dozens of concerts or sporting events. I tend to turn those down now unless it's a very special situation – because I want to have more time with my family. Call me weird. It's okay. I'm fine with being weird. Weird's all I've got. That and my sweet style.

It gives my wife and me something to talk about.

This one sounds bad without explanation, so, allow me to explain. My wife and I talk about all sorts of things – our jobs, our church, theology, politics, sports, movies, music, etc... You get the picture. I've read some parenting experts suggest that on date nights it's best not to talk about your kids. I think that is rubbish. We love talking about our kids. We talk about the things going on in their lives. Their triumphs and struggles. The funny things they say or do and how they make us laugh. We aren't putting our relationship on hold to focus more on our kids. Our kids are an integral part of our marriage relationship and we would be doing it a disservice if we tried to pretend that they did not exist when we have some "alone" time.

Being a dad has helped me grow up.

Prior to having children, technically speaking, I was a man. I had my first child when I was 25 years old. I *was* a man. (No

jokes, please.) I had a full-time job. I was married. I did adult things. Yet I didn't really grow up until my son was born. It wasn't a lightning strike kind of moment, but things crystallized for me in a way they never had before. I was now responsible for another life. That does something to you. It did to me. Adding two more boys to the mix only helped in this regard. I am now the most mature man in the world! (Again, no jokes please.)

Being a dad helps me stay young.

Plot twist! I am more responsible and more mature than before my kids were alive, yet having kids has helped keep me young at heart. I have the tendency to internalize things, stew on them. I can be a bit melancholy if left to my own devices. I am so thankful that I am not left to my own devices. There's just no room for my devices with three boys running around the house shooting nerf guns at each other. I get to see life through their eyes and it's amazing. Life is wide open for them with endless possibilities. I am blessed to be able to experience all of that with them. I love that I get to crack jokes, throw them the football outside, and act in ridiculous ways that drive their mother crazy. Take a few moments to pray for her – she lives with animals.

Being a dad has strengthened my relationship with God.

I understood God's love, mercy, grace, and reproof prior to having children of my own, but it was a limited understanding – like the proverbial dark glass. I still don't understand all those things as deeply as I should, but becoming a dad has made that glass a little less dark. I know what it feels like to be completely FOR my children. They are precious to me in ways that I did not know were possible. I want what is best

for them, so much so, that it hurts me deeply when they hurt, when they struggle, and when they fall. I ache for them. That is but a pale reflection of how God feels about me. I've also come to understand God's discipline better. At my best, I don't punish my kids capriciously or in anger. I do it with love and gentleness. Our Heavenly Father does this and more. He disciplines those He loves. And His hands heal the wounds of discipline. I will be their champion and I will guide their steps until they are ready to walk on their own. That is my divine calling as a father.

Those are just five of the dozens of reasons I am so happy to be a dad. I love my family. I love my kids. Being a dad has made me a better man, a better husband, and a better Christian. I know that in this day it is easy to look at children and families and see them as weights – things that are holding us back from living a truly fulfilled life. I find that to be unspeakably sad. Not everyone is called to fatherhood or even marriage, but those of us that are, we need to appreciate the great blessing and responsibility we have been given. It's not all fun and games though, and there are any number of things dads need to do so that their families do not become a burden or a source of stress and sadness. But at the end of the day, our job is to be obedient to the Scriptures and leave the rest in the hands of our Heavenly Father. Do me a favor though, in the middle of all that, take some time to appreciate what you have been given. Enjoy those wonderful arrows in your quiver. They are a gift from the Lord.

Five Parenting “Do’s”

Parenting is difficult, yet sometimes we make it much more difficult than it needs to be. I am not trying to minimize complex and challenging situations. I am blessed to have three very well-adjusted and compliant children. I realize that not everyone shares my experience. Yet the point still stands: we complicate and overthink things sometimes. [There are a handful of common sense things parents should not do](#), as there are some things parents should strive to do. Here are five things I have noticed in my time parenting that have produced good results. Hopefully this will be a help to other parents out there. Some of these things, maybe all, will not be brand new to you, but sometimes a reminder is just as important.

1. Love them sacrificially.

As stated above, some of these “do’s” will seem obvious, but it’s in the little details that we lose sight of the big picture. All good parents love their children. All good parents sacrifice for their children. Not all good parents do those things as consistently as they probably should. I don’t. Sometimes we have to be willing to sacrifice our time, our wants, our needs to enable our children to live their fullest life. That doesn’t mean we cater to them and their every whim though. (More on that a little later.) It does mean that at times, to show our children how much we love them, we give up our television time to play a game with them. It means that we go to school plays to support them, we attend their sporting events, we find odd jobs to help pay for their mission trip. The list goes on and on. Good parents do those things. Our children need to see self-sacrificial love played out in front of them at home. It will leave life-long marks on them.

2. Instill a proper sense of self-worth.

This is the flip side to point one. We do our children no favors if we teach them, whether by words or by actions, that they are the most important people in the world. In this day and age, self-esteem is a big deal, and parents are encouraged and told to make their kids feel like the most special and unique little treasures in the whole wide world. Parents fill their days inventing new ways to make little Johnny happy. Ways to keep Janie fulfilled and content. We do that by taking them to every event, every party, every activity. We do that by giving them everything they could ever want or need. We do that by refusing to accept their failures and using them as teachable moments and instead we find someone else to blame for the times they come up short.

This is all garbage.

Our children should feel loved, always. Our children should feel protected, always. Our children should know their true worth, always. Their true worth comes from their Creator and the fact that they were fearfully and wonderfully made in His image. They are special, but not because the world revolves around them. They are special because the person the world does revolve around loves them and made them to be His unique image bearers on the earth.

3. Say no.

This is not new or novel or original, but that doesn't make it any less important. Children want what they want and they want it right then. Sometimes, many times, giving them that thing they want is not in their best interest. Be an adult and learn how to say no. Now, some parenting experts advise against using negative words like "no", instead opting for positive ways to redirect. I'm no parenting expert but in their life, once they leave your home, your children will be told no on an almost daily basis. It's part of life. Training them for 18 plus years without ever saying no is a massive disservice to

their formation. It's okay to be the "bad guy" sometimes. You are their parent, not their friend.

4. Prepare them for failure.

Your child will not be great at everything. There will be areas of life where they struggle. It might be academic, or athletic, or even social. Don't shield them from their failures. Don't minimize them, hide them, or blame others. Let them own their shortcomings. Not in a mean or critical way, but in a way that lets them know that they are not perfect and there are just some things they cannot do. The Disney philosophy that teaches us that anyone can do anything as long as they believe is incomprehensibly stupid and borderline evil. We can't all be NBA players. We can't all be professional musicians. Teach your children to work hard, as hard as they can, but to understand that some things will be out of their reach. Some things are beyond their skill. And that is totally okay. It does not make them less than. It does not mean they are worthless. Help them find those things they are good at. Direct their energy towards areas where they are skilled. Challenge them to dream big. But let them fail. Let them learn that life is not always "fair." Don't handicap them with built in excuses about how the world is against them when things don't go their way.

5. Say you're sorry.

This one is probably the most difficult of all. We mess up. We mess up at our jobs. We mess up at home. We mess up as parents. We need to model repentance with our children. When we screw up with our kids, tell them. Ask their forgiveness. Say you are sorry. This teaches them that we will never get to a point in our lives where we are above mistakes and failings, but it will also teach them that there is forgiveness and restoration if repentance is sought. Our children need to see our broken hearts. They need to see our acknowledgement of sin and failures. They need to have faith that we hold ourselves to the same standards we are holding them. If you have not

done this before, it will be very difficult the first few times. Do it enough and it will feel completely natural. God will bless a home that is transparent and accountable.

Hopefully these five things are already a part of your parenting life. If not, I hope something in here will help you in your journey. Please share your comments and ideas below. I love to interact with other parents and learn ways to better myself as a father.

The Annual Super Awesome Film Festival: Making Wiser Movie Choices

I've said this before, but it is worth repeating: I love movies. In some ways, I am probably a little too in love with movies. Many [jokes have been made](#) at my expense at my single-minded obsession with *The Lord of the Rings* Movies. I'm not that compulsive with all movies, but I watch, think about, and discuss movies more than most people I know. It only seemed natural then, to share that love of movies with my kids.

I've watched movies or television shows with my boys since they were little. When they were young, we watched things they enjoyed and I had to sit patiently and long for the day when I could introduce them to the things I loved and enjoyed. I jumped the gun a few times though. I watched the *Star Wars* films with my middle son when he was too young to appreciate them. His older brother loved them, but it has taken him time to even tolerate them, all because he wasn't ready. Similarly,

I thought my oldest son was ready for *The Lord of the Rings*, but I was proven wrong when he completely freaked out over Bilbo trying to take the ring away from Frodo in Rivendell. For those that have seen the film, you know the scene I am referencing. Kindly, old Bilbo, fueled by his desire for the ring of power, transforms into a snarling, angry creature. It is a shocking moment and it caught my son completely by surprise. He had nightmares about that scene for a very long time afterwards. I felt like a complete failure for not recognizing how that scene, or other scenes, could potentially horrify him. It was after that traumatic event, I decided that I needed to do better. I needed to be more thoughtful about what we watched and when we watched.

It was around this time that one of my favorite film critics, Drew McWeeny, started writing a series called [Film Nerd 2.0](#). While I didn't always agree with what films he introduced to his boys, and I would have pretty strong reservations about endorsing the entirety of his approach, the specific, thought-out system he created appealed to me. I knew my version would look different, but he had inspired me to do this whole "watching movies with my kids" thing better.

The Super Awesome Film Festival was born

Five years ago, I kicked off our very first *Annual Super Awesome Film Festival* ©. We held the festival over the summer, when the boys had later bed times and our schedules were not as busy. For that first Festival, I chose four movies to watch over one weekend. At that time, my youngest son was only four years old, so he would only watch one of the films. I chose a couple films that were new to the older boys, one favorite that they wanted to see again, and one that my youngest had not seen but would hopefully enjoy. We made a big deal out of the whole thing – we bought popcorn and movie theater style candy. We had drinks aplenty. The entire event was a huge

success and has since become an annual tradition.

The film selection has grown and expanded with each year. The following year, I even made a simple poster for the Festival.



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enlarge

That year, my youngest was able to watch two of the films in the lineup – *Willow* and *Peter Pan*. He enjoyed both of them and proclaimed them the best movies he had ever seen. He has since adjusted his rankings a bit. The older two fell in love with *Remember the Titans* in a way that I did not expect. I figured they would like it, but their level of passion for that film took me by surprise.

Each year I have attempted to introduce new types of films to the boys, not just the action/adventure films they love so much. As they get older and able to handle more difficult and complex storytelling, I will challenge them with lesser known gems or films way outside of their interests. Besides having a good time with my kids, I hope that the films we watch serve as a chance for discussion and inquiry. I still do my best to balance the festivals with plenty of fun and exciting stuff, but I don't want to limit our viewing to only one style of film.

This year we are finally watching the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* films with my youngest son, who turned eight a few weeks ago. Almost all of his friends at school have seen these films – some starting back when they were three or four years old. I chose to wait, convinced that he would enjoy them but not truly appreciate them as much as he could at that young

age. Plus, all of the films, while very clean, have content that is just too much for someone that young. The older boys are watching the *Marvel* films with us, so I will also select a couple of films to watch with just them that will keep them on their toes and engage a different part of their mind and heart. While the Annual Film Festival has been the primary example of my adjusted approach to movie watching with my kids, I now work through a similar process any time we watch something.

What we watch matters

As a Christian, I believe that what we consume – physically, mentally, or otherwise – affects us. I believe that as a father, it is my responsibility to develop discernment and wisdom in my children. Right now, I am their guardian and their protector. For the most part I can control what enters their eyes and ears. There are various approaches that I have seen for how to do this.

There is the avoidance approach – shielding our children's eyes from anything and everything potentially dangerous. Building a wall around them so that the sin of the world cannot stain them. The problem with this approach is that sin has already stained them, regardless how much I protect and shield them. And this approach does nothing to help them make good, and Godly, decisions as they age. Instead, it leaves them vulnerable and weak; unable to process and examine the sound and fury the world will throw at them once they are away from the defenses built by their parents.

Then there is the full embrace approach – letting our children watch anything and everything because it's "just a movie." This approach goes hand-in-hand with the idea that we turn our brains off when we watch television or movies, simply because we need a way to unwind and relax. This approach exposes our

children to content, ideas, and worldviews they are unable to process or examine. They are fed dangerous philosophies about life, religion, faith, morality, and a host of other important things. It's akin to putting your eight-year-old behind the wheel of a car with no training or practice.

Finally, we have the "examine everything" approach. This approach does not hide from the ugly or the sinful, but uses wisdom and common sense to determine what and when we watch. It puts the onus on the parents to actually think about what they allow their children to watch. Taking it further, we should be on the look out for more than just curse words or dirty jokes. There are plenty of films aimed squarely at families and children that contain no cursing, no sex, and no offensive jokes, but are entirely bankrupt in the philosophy and worldview they present. This approach forces us to do some hard work on the front and back end. We can't just watch a movie that contains problematic material, and leave it hanging in their minds with no further exploration on our part. As parents, and more importantly, as Christian parents, we are called to do much better.

Final thoughts – One size does not fit all

I don't want this to seem like I am advocating for my way and only my way. I realize that every parent has a different perspective. That is one reason why I did not delve into checklists or comprehensive guides. What you do needs to work for you and your family. But—and I believe this as strongly as anything I have written—we have to take this seriously. Your approach might vary significantly from mine, but as long as you are approaching it with wisdom and thoughtfulness, I can't really criticize. The key is that you are thinking about these things. You are engaging with your children and what they are being exposed to. As parents, we have to stop being lazy and complacent about the things our children consume. There is too

much power in the things they are seeing, reading, and hearing for us to give anything but our best.

So, develop your own traditions. Hold your own film festival. Do a movie marathon. Do what works for you. I'll be over at the Lytle house holding the Fifth Annual Super Awesome Film Festival. We'll be eating popcorn and candy, watching Iron Man and Atticus Finch, and spending some time examining everything carefully and holding on to what is good.

The Best Dad in the World's Blog

What a week! I'm not one to pat myself on the back or anything, but my parenting game was totally on point this week. Just knocked it out of the park time and time again. It's weeks like this that make me realize how amazing my parenting skills are and how important I am to the lives of my kids. Frankly, without me, I'm not sure there would be any hope for those little monsters!

I don't really want to take the time to write down every single thing that happened this week, though, it might be wise to do so in case others want to learn from my sterling example down the road. I'll limit myself to a few classic examples of what I call "Parenting Par Excellence."

On Monday, the boys and I were sitting down to watch a TV show while eating our supper. (We like to spend as much time as possible watching television together because it really helps us bond. It is much more productive and beneficial than

talking, I know that much at least!) One of my boys, I'll save him the embarrassment by not naming him, was acting a little bratty. He didn't want to watch the same show as the rest of us. He even got a little smart-mouthed with me about it. I get it; there is a time and place for being a smart-aleck. Sometimes the situation calls for it. It's usually not cool to be a smart-aleck to your dad though, so I did what every great father before me has done: I unleashed a torrent of sarcasm and smart-aleckness that broke him down and put him in his place for good. He was all teary-eyed and distant the rest of the day, but that's actually a good thing because it shows that he learned his lesson. He was well and truly humbled.

Later in the week, on a spectacularly beautiful day, the boys kept begging me to go outside and play with them. They wanted me to throw the football to them or something. I usually don't mind doing this with them as we usually have a pretty good time. There was one problem: I was in the middle of watching a movie on Netflix and I really didn't want to have to stop and try to pick it up later. My rule in these situations is pretty simple – kids need to learn that most of the time what they want to do is much less important than what their parents want to do. So much so as to render their wants, needs, and desires irrelevant. It's good for them to be told "no", even in situations when there really isn't a good reason for it. Granted, I had a really good reason this time (movie!), but the rule still applies. They were sad and disappointed but that is good for them in the long run. One of my main jobs as a parent is to teach them about life, and we all know that life is full of disappointments. So, I try to disappoint them as often as I possibly can. It is for their own good.

Well, that's about all I have time to write today. I could go on and on, but honestly, I would much rather get back to scrolling through Twitter and Facebook. A healthy social engagement is incredibly beneficial in these troubled times. I like to have my finger on the pulse of society. Plus, I need

some “me” time today after having spent a week pouring my heart and soul into my kids.

Stay blessed!

About the Best Dad in the World:

*On December 1, 2016, Phillip Lytle was honored with the prestigious “Best Dad in the World” award by the preeminent parenting organization – the **Consortium Rewarding Amazing Parenting**. Each year, the winner receives a plaque, a not-so-modest financial prize, and a platform to share their mastery of parenting. This blog is that platform. We hope you enjoy the wisdom contained herein.*

Five Parenting “Don’ts”

I’m a dad. Have been for over 13 years. I have three wonderful, intelligent, funny, thoughtful, and loving boys.[1. I have also had the great opportunity to be a foster parent and a host father for an international student.] They have blessed my life in ways I could not have imagined prior to their births. Each of them has taught me new truths about God and living. Personally, I would love to take all the credit for how great they are. I wish their big hearts and amazing personalities had everything to do with all the great parenting decisions I have made throughout their lives. I can’t. The truth is, I have done really well in the parenting department at times and have failed spectacularly at other times. I figured I would pull the curtain back a bit on my own life and share five things you should probably do, or not do,

in raising your children.

1. Don't parent from the couch.

I know you have probably heard this one a million times. Too bad. You probably need to hear it a million and one times. After a long, hard day at work, the “easiest” thing to do is to sit on the couch, put something on TV that will serve as a distraction to you and just tell the kids to give you some space. What you might not realize is that your kids hear those words and they interpret them as “Please come in here every five minutes with some new argument, fight, disruption, or complaint.” They see your tired face and decide this is the exact moment in their life when they will need you most. In fact, they have never nor will they ever need you more than they do right now. Trust me on this: Engaging and interacting with your kids, even if you are tired, will help you get more rest in the long run. You will not get any more rest by trying to avoid your parenting responsibilities. You will go to bed exhausted and frustrated and feeling like a failure as a parent.

2. Don't be condescending.

As your kids get older, they will begin to test boundaries. Sometimes, that is as simple as using a tone of voice that could be perceived, if heard in the exact right way, in the exact right time, as being slightly disrespectful. I know! Your little angel might actually be snarky or dismissive when they speak to you. The horror! You know what makes them reevaluate their attitudes and instantly ask forgiveness for their impertinence? Being snarky and rude back to them. It's as if you poured a healing balm on their bristly and unhappy souls. Back here in the real world, it's more like you poured gasoline on a fire. They will learn that it's okay to speak in

a rude and disrespectful manner if it accomplishes their goal. Don't go down to their level. Bring them up to yours.

3. Don't attempt to teach them by mimicking their poor behavior.

I tried this recently. It might have been the biggest failure of my parenting life. Here's the story: My family was playing tennis. One of my boys responded to a few plays with a negative attitude. He was asked to correct it. He chose not to but instead continued to mutter under his breath and act in a way that was not acceptable. Instead of pulling him aside and having a calm and mature conversation with him, I chose to do the next best thing: Imitate his behavior in an effort to show him how ridiculous he looked. I began to respond with angry mutterings. I hit the ball in an angry manner; at times so hard I nearly knocked it out of the court. It got so bad, that my boys said they did not want to play anymore but I wasn't finished with my little performance. I told them, in as loud and as boorish of a voice as I could, that they were going to play until I said we were done. I brought my son to tears. I almost broke him. I had made a complete fool of myself. No matter what my rationale had been, my actions were more motivated by my temper and my need to be in charge. I apologized to all my boys and my wife when we got back home. I hope I never see that side of myself again.

4. Don't over-schedule.

I realize this one might be a point of contention for some but I truly believe that many parents sign their children up for as much as they can, afraid that they will miss out on something they might love. I get that. I understand where that thinking comes from. Hear me out, though. Spending time at home with family is vastly more important than one more soccer

league. Or one more piano practice. Or one more...you get the point. I'm not disparaging sports or other activities. They are beneficial to your child's development. But do not be so busy with those things that you have no time at home. Your kids will learn much more by being with you, doing things with you, spending time with you than they will from any league, event, or activity.

5. Don't neglect reading the Bible together.

Full confession here: I am still struggling with this one. We (my wife and I) have done well at times. When the boys were young, we read the Bible to them almost every night. We have done family devotions sporadically in the past few years. I am trying to get us back on track in this regard. And as soon as I restarted our Bible study, it was apparent how much my boys wanted it. My seven-year-old asked for a real Bible so he could follow along. (We have used different Kid's Bibles for him in the past, but none of them had the entire Bible in it.) I gave him his new Bible last night and I don't think he put it down until he went to bed. He asked if he could read it before he went to sleep. Your kids are receptive and eager to learn about God. Don't assume they are getting enough from church or simply from seeing the way you live. Feed them the Word.

I hope this helps. I am not an expert. I have no degree in parenting or childrearing. What I do have though, is 13 years of trying, failing, trying again, falling on my face, and occasionally succeeding. Maybe you can learn from my mistakes and be better off for it. If you have some advice, some things to avoid, or questions, feel free to post them in the comment section below.

Present Tense Parenting

Being a father is one of the biggest challenges that any man will face. Having that kind of influence over another human being can be daunting. Yet, even with all the hard work and long days, the job is not without its rewards. In fact, the rewards far outweigh the responsibilities.

Too often though, we tend to lose focus of the present. We look back and relive the great moments when our kids were younger, sweeter, and cuter. Or, we look ahead, longing for a day when our kids will be more independent, less needy, and not as annoying.[1. Don't roll your eyes. Your kids annoy you sometimes. I'm just willing to admit it publicly.] We romanticize the past, and we idealize the future. The present is when all the hard work happens. This makes it feel worse than what has come before, lost in the haze of the past, or not as blissfully idyllic as the far-off future. It can be so easy to overlook the great stuff that is happening right in front of us.

We romanticize the past, and we idealize the future. It can be so easy to overlook the great stuff that is happening right in front of us.

When they are young, your children think you are hilarious. I can make my eleven-year-old son laugh at any moment.[2. My wife can say or do the exact same thing and it might produce a smile.] My jokes cause uncontrolled laughter, falling down on the floor giggling fits, and pleas for me to say or do that funny thing again. As they get older, your children will find you less funny. Your hilarious jokes become "Dad" jokes. You might even get an eye roll or two. Don't let that discourage

you. Embrace each stage. Be the comedian when they are laughing. Be the embarrassing dad when they are not. The most important ingredient here is you. Even if your kids are too old and “sophisticated” to laugh at your jokes, they will see your heart and feel your love for them simply because you are present.

On the flip side, your kids will make you laugh. A lot. My kids are hilarious. Sometimes, when they are attempting to be funny, it falls flat. Particularly my youngest child who just turned seven. But when he is simply himself, he makes me laugh more than almost any person I know. My eleven year old son makes me smile more than laugh. He is funny, but his honest and pure love of life comes through often, and it is infectious. And my oldest son, all of thirteen years, is developing a great, sarcastic sense of humor. His mother and I are extremely proud. Take time to enjoy it all. Enjoy the awful jokes your younger children will tell.[3. Trust me. It gets better. But you are going to have to perfect the fake smile and laugh. Work on those in private when your children are sleeping.] Enjoy the early, faltering attempts at sarcasm and wit your middle-school aged kids will attempt. Enjoy laughing at every little thing your little ones do when they aren't even trying to be funny. But don't get stuck looking back on those great times, wishing you could relive them. And don't look ahead during those awkward phases when their sense of humor seems to have taken 10 steps back. Appreciate each one for what it is: a chance to watch your children develop their personalities.

Your kids are asking questions and pushing back because they are trying to form their identity. They are looking for answers. Guide them to those answers. Don't get frustrated because they don't accept everything at face value.

Your children will look to you as the ultimate authority in

all matters when they are little. That will seem like heaven when they are older and are questioning EVERY THING YOU SAY. Take a step back and you might see how irrational it is of you to long for those days of total trust. You know you don't know everything. You know you make mistakes. You know you are wrong from time to time. As your children grow and mature, they are going to realize that as well. If they don't, you are doing something wrong. Accept that. Use that. If your children are asking you questions, that is a wonderful opportunity to engage with them on a deeper level than usual. You will have the opportunity to explain what you believe, why you parent the way you do, and why you live the way you live. Your kids are asking questions and pushing back because they are trying to form their identity. They are looking for answers. Guide them to those answers. Help them find their identity. Don't get frustrated because they don't accept everything at face value.

And even when it doesn't feel like your children love you very much, you just need to trust that the love and hard work you poured into them will win out.

Perhaps the most difficult area to truly live in the present is in how your children show you love. It's not hard to see their love when they are young. They hug, they kiss, and they hold your hand. They say "I love you" all the time. Brace yourselves. That phase will end. You might go months between "I love yous" from your teenage son. It might be even longer. That's okay. They will show how much they love you in other ways. Those ways will vary depending on your child, but keep your eyes open for them. And even when it doesn't feel like your children love you very much, you just need to trust that the love and hard work you poured into them will win out. They will come around. My seven year old tells me he loves me every day, usually unprompted. My eleven year old tells me he loves me most days, but usually after I have said it first.[4.

Yes, I am one of those weird dads that say “I love you” to my kids every day.] My thirteen year old rarely says it. Not even when I say it first. I could let that break my heart. But that would be suffering for no reason. I see how my son behaves. I see how he interacts with me and with his family. I see his heart at home, church, and everywhere else. I KNOW he loves me. He uses everything but words to say it. And that is just fine with me.

When is the best time to be a dad? Right now. Don't miss the joys of today. Don't get stuck in your past, wishing you could somehow go back. Don't look ahead to when things will be “easier.” Be here now. That is the most important thing.

Five Things I Learned From Being A Stay At Home Dad

Two years ago my wife was offered an amazing job opportunity. We weren't ready to put our kids in daycare. So we decided that I would stay home with the kids. In a few months our youngest son will be starting Kindergarten and I will be going back to work. The closing of this “stay at home” chapter has given me a chance to reflect on the last two years. Here are five things I have learned from being a stay at home dad.

1. It is hard work

First of all, being a stay at home parent is hard work. I knew my wife was busy during the day, but I never really thought about it that much. For the first few months I was basking in the glow of not getting ready and going to “work.” After that wore off and the cold reality set in, I began to realize my expectations were silly. I thought I would be chillin' out all

day, listening to my favorite music and reading my favorite books. The focus was all on me. The thing is, kids think it's all about them! They want me to do everything for them. Who do they think they are anyway? My days have been filled with getting kids dressed, doing laundry, making meals, doing dishes, cleaning the house, going grocery shopping, going to the library, chauffeuring kids around, art projects, legos, playing outside, and (no exaggeration) one million trips to the playground. How do my kids never get tired of the playground? Being a stay at home parent is hard work. I applaud all of you who have done it. I only did it for two years. My wife stayed home for five years. To those who stay at home, I salute you.

2. It can feel isolating

We live in Indiana in the great cold north. Or not so great, depending on your affinity for snow. Indiana winters mean lots of staying inside. Sure there is the occasional snow sledding day, but more often than not it is the doldrums. I can only watch my kid's favorite episode of Thomas the Train so many times. Can I get a witness? I vaguely remember the term "seasonal depression" before I stayed home with my kids. Now I can fully relate. These last two years I've stared out of the window trying with all my power to will spring to begin. I just want to say I love spring. (Also, death to winter. I hate you.)

I've learned from other stay at home parents that this is a common feeling. Being surrounded by kids all day and being mostly stuck in your house is isolating. This plays out in many ways, but depression is one of them. I've never sunk down into a deep depression, but staying at home every long, cold day for months in a row got to me. It felt boring. It was monotonous. I started to wonder if I was doing the right thing and why I was doing this. I think all adults want a sense of purpose in life. Sometimes that can get lost when you are a stay at home parent.

3. Money is tight

I remember when my wife and I were dating. We had this great conversation about our philosophy of raising kids. One thing we strongly agreed on was having a parent stay at home until the kids were in school. We've stuck to that commitment. There is a side effect, however, that we didn't anticipate. We've only had one income. God has provided everything we need but money has been tight. I don't view this as a negative thing. I look at it like this; we've had the opportunity to learn how to live on one income.

I know all situations are different and for many families both parents have to work. For us though, one income was good because we've learned how to have a very simple lifestyle. We haven't had cable in several years. We normally only go out to eat once a week and sometimes not even that. I think in the last five years we've gone to see a movie an average of 3 times a year. We buy most clothes second hand. We buy most of our food at Aldi. If you are a stay at home parent and money is tight, then I encourage you to look at this season as an opportunity to pare down your life to what really matters.

4. It is countercultural

What do I mean by countercultural? The best way to explain that is to summarize most conversations I've had telling people that I'm a stay at home dad.

Person: "What do you do?"

Me: "I'm a stay at home dad"

Person (with a strange look on their face) ".....hm. uh. great?"

The truth is, being a stay at home dad is not normal. People don't know what to do with it. Men are supposed to go out and win the bread right? Trust me, this has been my biggest struggle. I've had insecurity these last two years about the transition that my wife and I decided to try. Honestly, it's felt like a culture experiment. It's awkward to buy a gift for

my wife. "Hey honey, is it okay if I use some of your money to buy you something for your birthday?" For all the weirdness, I wouldn't change a thing. You want to know why? Because I can relate to what my wife went through (and she can relate to what I went through). I know when she gets home from work she needs some decompression time. She knows that on the weekends one of the best things she can do for me is let me have some time outside of the house to myself. Our marriage partnership is stronger than ever.

5. It is rewarding

After reading the first four things you're probably not that excited about being a stay at home parent. Sorry, not trying to be a downer, just being honest. This last one will cheer you up, and if I do my job right, make you cry. Being a stay at home dad has been so rewarding. I wouldn't trade these last two years for anything (except maybe two years in a place where there is no such thing as winter). I've had the opportunity to spend two years with my two sons. That is time that I can never get back.

Most of the things that are the worst about being a stay at home dad are also the best. Those one million trips to the playground were one million chances for me to bond with my sons. All those times driving them around I got to listen to my boys sing worship songs in the back seat. Those long days inside provided multitudes of teaching moments. My oldest is about to start first grade and my youngest is about to start kindergarten. Now they will be at school all day. The hard pill to swallow is that I won't get to spend nearly as much time with my sons in the future. Hopefully these last two years I've been able to give them invaluable training. It was all worth it!

Can I Be Passionate about Sports and Still Be a Good Father?

I love sports. Some of my fondest childhood memories involve watching games with my dad. My passion for sports comes naturally. In other ways, I am too obsessed with sports; particularly anything related to the Tennessee Titans. (Stop rolling your eyes. I get it.) The Titans have been bad for a long time. It's not easy rooting for a team that is consistently in the bottom fourth of the league. Believe me. I know. That hasn't stopped me from watching every game. It hasn't stopped me from holding out hope that things will turn around. I am committed. Rain or shine, I will be watching if the Titans are playing. And I will be cheering them on.

Before going any further, I want to make a few things very clear:

1. This article will have many more questions than answers. I haven't figured things out yet. So, if you have, please tell me what has worked for you.
2. I am not an expert fan or father. I have never tailgated. I am not a season ticket holder. I haven't won the coveted "Father of the Year" award. I don't think those things disqualify me from talking about this issue.

A few years ago, I noticed that after every loss by the Titans, I would be in a pretty awful mood. I was angry, impatient, and unpleasant. But, I figured I deserved to be angry because my team had failed me once again. I earned that anger. It was a righteous anger. (It was not righteous, I hadn't earned it, and I am a moron.)

I was not being the kind of father that my boys needed.

The other thing I noticed is that my boys were getting incredibly upset when the Titans lost. They were angry, impatient and unpleasant. I was appalled at their attitude and behavior. APPALLED! That's when it hit me: they were just kids that were learning how to react to their team losing from one of their most influential teachers: Me. And I was doing a terrible job. I was not being the kind of father that my boys needed. I was showing them that an insignificant thing like football could seriously affect their emotions, and that was okay. It was okay to act like a spoiled brat after your team loses.

Once I saw that, it made me feel like a complete failure. I decided that things had to change. I'll let you in on a little secret here: Change has come slowly and painfully. At first, I simply pretended I wasn't as invested as I actually was. Inside, I was boiling hot when the Titans lost. But outside, I put on a brave face and made sure my boys saw me at my calm and levelheaded best. The problem was, the loss still affected my mood. I might not have been angry, but I traded that for sullenness. I might have conquered my impatience, but I replaced that with disengagement. I was still unpleasant. Clearly, this technique was not working.

I briefly flirted with choosing to stop caring about sports anymore. That worked for about 5 seconds. It was as the hip people say: A non-starter.

In the end, I settled on a fragile truce. I still love the Titans. (Stop making that face.) I still watch every game. I cheer for them. I complain about the referees. I complain about the team messing things up virtually every week. I go crazy when they win. (It happened 3 times this season...Yay for us?) I still get upset when they lose. (At this point, you might be thinking that this new system doesn't sound any

different than before. You might be right.) I do all those things, and I have added a few new things to my Sunday afternoon repertoire.

It is okay to get excited about the winning and sad about the losing. I have told them that it is not okay to allow the final score of a sporting event to affect their attitude or behavior.

I have talked to my boys about how it is okay to cheer for their favorite teams. It is okay to get excited about the winning and sad about the losing. I have told them that it is *not* okay to allow the final score of a sporting event to affect their attitude or behavior. I have told them that I have not always followed my own advice and that I am working on it. I hope that since they see me working through this with them, it will show them that there will be things in their lives that require help from others to overcome.

The end result has been a mixed bag. I do feel like I am getting better. I don't hold on to the losses like I used to. It had gotten so bad that it would carry over to the next few days. How insane is that? My boys are not getting as upset when the Titans lose. I guess one could argue that they are so disheartened by all the losses that they have no emotions left. I hope that is not the case. We watch the games together and when it is over, our lives continue. Maybe that is enough. They still get crazy happy when the Titans win. They still get sad when they lose. But I'm not seeing as much anger, impatience, or unpleasantness after a loss. It's a small victory but I'll take it. At its best, cheering on our favorite team is a bonding experience with my children. One that I learned from watching sports with my dad. (I hasten to add that I never saw my dad act in the awful and immature manner that I am confessing.) Any time spent with my boys doing something we all love, is time well spent. I just need

to learn how to spend that time as wisely and as effectively as I can.

Thanks for reading this. Hopefully someone out there has some good advice on how to handle this. Until then, I will be monitoring all the Titans' blogs and websites to see who the Titans hire as their next head coach.