

# A Father's Reward

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## Part One

# Ozzie and Harriet Are Dead

Stepping off the plane in Denver, I was welcomed by my brother-in-law, two business colleagues, and my 14-year-old son. While I shook hands with my friends, it was clear my son had something important to tell me. He was literally jumping up and down with excitement.

“Dad!” he cried. “I can’t wait to tell you what I did last night!”

“Okay, Paul,” I replied, winking at the other men in the group, “what is it?”

“I did my first joint!”

Suddenly conversations ceased.

With acute embarrassment I glanced at my friends, who were suddenly all looking at their shoes, grimacing. I opened my mouth, and no words came out. With a mighty effort, I got hold of my emotions. Turning to face my son head-on, I angrily muttered, “Paul . . . you’d better tell me what you’re talking about.”

My son, still smiling innocently, looked at me as though he was pleased as punch. “Well, Dad, you know how I’ve wanted to build a bookcase for the new room? Last night I learned how to do a hand-mitered joint!”

“Oh,” was all I could reply, until I noticed the snorting sound coming from my brother-in-law, who sounded like he was having an attack of some kind. His whole body was shaking and he was trying so hard to keep from laughing out loud that he was having trouble standing up. “Well, Paul, that’s great!” I finally managed, noticing the relieved smiles on my friends’ faces. My son still didn’t know what everybody thought was so funny, so he just started telling the story of learning to use a miter box and backsaw. By the time he was finished, we had all looked at each other and shared a sigh of relief.

“It’s refreshing,” one of my friends told me later, “that your boy could get so euphoric over learning to use a simple tool . . . and amazing that he would bother telling you about it.”

“It’s not so amazing,” I assured him. “We talk a lot. Paul had learned something new, and wanted to share his discovery with me. Doesn’t your son do that?”

My friend, who is a godly man and a leader in his church, looked at me with a pained expression in his eyes and said, “Phil, my son never talks to me anymore. And if he told me he’d tried a joint, I would know it wasn’t the kind made of wood.” After a pause, he added, “I wish I could have that kind of relationship with my kid . . . But I guess I never really felt close to my own father.”

“Hey,” I told him, “welcome to the club.”

I’m no perfect father. You don’t have to take my word for it—ask my kids, and they’ll tell you. My dad never had time for me, so I didn’t really have a model to follow other than watching “Ozzie and Harriet” on TV. When I first became a dad, I had no idea what to do. I was afraid of babies and disgusted with diapers. Somehow I figured if I worked hard and wore a tie regularly, everything would work out—after all, it always did for Ozzie and Harriet.

I soon realized that Ozzie and Harriet are dead. Boys don't come home from school and sit and around the kitchen drinking milk and talking with their moms anymore. There are a million other diversions that are far more interesting. Girls don't leap into Daddy's arms to say good night—it would appear too unsophisticated. In an activity-filled, pleasure-seeking world, I've got a lot of competition for my kids' attention. So if I wanted to keep a close relationship with my kids, I realized I was going to have to do something different. And if I want them to grow up to be Christians, I'm going to have to disciple them. I decided years ago I had better learn a few facts about fathering if I were to have any chance of succeeding.

## **Building Lines of Communication in Your Home**

Communication involved a lot more than words. It is best founded on trust, transparency, and truth. So when communicating with your kids . . .

- Be at the right place at the right time—just as though they were important clients.
- Ask them about their day and be willing to listen to what they have to say.
- Begin with a period of encouragement and affirmation.
- Be willing to share with them the struggles of your day without dumping on them unprocessed problems.
- Ask feeling questions, such as, “How are you feeling after the loss of the game?”
- Discuss positive attributes of your friends.
- Ask open-ended relationship questions such as, “Who do you spend the most time with?” “Who do you feel listens the best to you “ or “Have I don’t anything that has hurt your feelings lately?”
- Confess any known interruption of fellowship which you’ve caused.
- Remember that a gentle hug goes a long way.
- Sometimes, let silence reign. Your being silent will encourage your children to fill the air with feeling words and factual statements.
- Ask them for feedback, advice, or input.
- If there has been a recent difficulty in the family, continue to ask follow-up questions several days or weeks later.

## **Teach Your Children to Work**

- Explain to your kids the economic system of labor and wages.
- Don't just tell your children to work or be diligent, demonstrate it by modeling those principles in your own life and by showing them what to do on a particular task.
- It takes a long time to train a two-year-old how to put away his blanket – and just as long to train a 16-year-old how to change oil in his car.
- Once a child has grasped what to do and why to do it, give him a reasonable time of practice before you seek to enforce the task by accountability.
- Don't expect what you don't inspect. Begin with simple accountability such as, "I'll check back later and see how you are doing."
- Both boys and girls can value from learning how to change a tire, sew on a button, clean the house, vacuum a rug, load a dishwasher, and repair a broken chair.
- To pay someone to read the Bible may never achieve the desired result of becoming a more godly, but to give him a \$100 reward for reading through the Bible in a year may be just the incentive he needs to read those three chapters a day instead of watching another movie.

## **Build a Safe Relationship**

- Avoid always having an agenda when you sit and talk with your children.
- Try to spend some time “hanging out” with them, Even if it’s while doing something else.
- Don’t just “hang out” – have good face-to-face quality time on a date regularly.
- Don’t talk negatively about your spouse with your children.
- Don’t criticize their friends or their behavior without asking a lot of questions and building a rapport first.