

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Ideas to foster a family-friendly church

I have some homework for you this month. Ask your kids what your go-to parenting phrase is. Then stop and reflect. If your children are too young or can't think of a response, ask yourself what you'd like your catchphrase to be. What does it say about you? What does it say about whom you want your children to be? It's easy to get lost in the day-to-day chaos of family life. Consider writing down your ideal phrase and posting it where you (and your family) can see it and take stock each day. Keep reading to find out what phrases other Christian parents have adopted.

—Nicole Balza

WHEN I WAS A teacher, I wrote a mission statement, taught it to my students, and started each day in the classroom by rapping the words. It went, "Here we are at Garden Homes today. Praising God in all we do and say. Building each other up, not tearing people down. Staying focused all day, not playing around. Here we are at Garden Homes today. Praising God in all we do and say." I loved hearing my students start their day with these words.

Once my own children became school age, I decided to teach them the mission statement that I once taught my students. Did I want my kids to praise God in all they did and said that day? Yes. Did I want them to build up their classmates and not tear them down? Yeah, that sounds great. Did I want them to stay focused at school and not play around while their teacher taught them? For all you teachers out there . . . YES!

So, to this very day, while our car is pulling out of the driveway and we head to school, one of my kids starts us off by saying, "1, 2, 3, GO!" and then we all proceed to rap the mission statement, with a couple tweaks for our family.

Do we live by it perfectly? No. Is it a great tool to reference when we struggle? Definitely.

"Clean up your room."

"Stop doing that!"

"Come here right now."

Our kids are watching us. Listening to us. Picking up on the good, the bad, the ugly. For a long time, that absolutely terrified me. I thought that all of my slipups would be the things that they'd remember the most.

The harping. The nagging. I thought it all depended on me. What a big task to place on someone who is not the Savior.

My kids have a Savior. He is Jesus.

I praise God for the four loans that he placed in my care. I pray that he gives me words always to point them back to him. I pray that they see that most of my conversations are with him and join in and chat with the one who loves them the most.



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"DON'T MAKE A career out of eating your dinner."

Instead of presuming what "profound" words I might have impressed on my children, I asked one of them, "What is something I say to you often?"

Without missing a beat, my son echoed one of my dinner table declarations: "Don't make a career out of eating your dinner."

It's true, I have often reminded my children to consume their daily bread in a timely manner. (And if any of them ever becomes a professional food taster, I will gladly recant my words.) But of all words I would want my children to remember, that phrase wouldn't make my top ten or even top one hundred list. *That's what you've learned from me?*

Scripture speaks about the power of words and of the tongue. That is a humbling thought for any par-

ent to ponder! My son's response had me contritely contemplating, *What else have I said without careful thought that has left an impression on my children?* My son's response also had me humbly praying, "Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

Far more powerful than my word is the living and active Word of God.

And he does! Our God hears and answers our parenting prayers for Jesus' sake. Our God calms our worry-prone hearts by reminding us that our words aren't the most powerful in our children's lives. Far more powerful than a dad's dinner table declaration is the triune God's baptismal declaration, "You, dear child, are mine! Forgiven. Washed. Adopted." Far more powerful than my word is the living and active Word of God. That is a humbling thought for any parent to ponder!

It is just as humbling when our children provide us with reminders of whose children they really are. After getting home late from an after-school activity, one of my children was eating after the rest of us. She was hungry and didn't need any reminders about timely eating. Yet before she ate, she paused to thank her heavenly Father for the daily bread. Her lips whispered, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." What a profound impact her heavenly Father has had on her! And yet, whom did the heavenly Father use to teach her to pray? What a profound impact her father and mother have had on her!

God bless the impressionable words you speak and lessons you teach, dear parents, even when your children try to make a career out of eating their dinner.



Joel Russow and his wife, Jill, are raising four children in Mequon, Wisconsin. Joel is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.



ALMOST ANYONE looking back on his or her childhood can recall the words "because I said so" coming from his or her parents' lips. It's a valid reason in many instances, yet frustrating to hear. In my children's case, they've heard the phrase "because it's my job"

more often than they would like. It carries a similar meaning, but I pray that over the last 16 years, I've used the phrase to help them understand my role and theirs in God's plan for our family.

Flashback to 2016. My children were two (Claire), four (Seth), and six (Ella). I was in Seth's room comforting him after a spanking (he had pulled Ella's hair so hard that she had fallen over) when Ella called me to the kitchen. Claire was on the counter getting herself a glass of water, which had overflowed down the cabinets and across the kitchen floor. I yelled, "Claire Hannah Schaefer, please go to your room!" and she immediately ducked her head in shame and started sobbing. As I was cleaning up, Ella came in to say, "Mom, I really think Claire is ready to be forgiven. She said she's sorry and is hiding in the closet." I went in to hear her apologize and told her that I forgave her. Ella informed me that Claire had already folded her hands and said sorry to Jesus and that they had prayed together.

I don't share this as an ideal parenting example (because chances are I was disciplining my son in anger and losing my cool simply because my child was being childlike). I share it because it was one of many times that led to me say things like, "Buddy, I don't like to spank you, but it's my job as your mom to discipline you so that you learn to do your job of obeying and following God's ways" and "Sweetheart, I will always love and forgive you because it's my job to teach you about how Jesus always loves and forgives us all."

More recently, when my middle schoolers ask for the hundredth time why they have to practice piano or proofread their essays, they hear, "Because *it's my job* to help you develop your talents, and it'll be your job to decide how to use them to God's glory for the rest of your lives." Or when my conscientious teen says that I have enough to do and should just go to bed even though I know she really needs a good chat and would appreciate help packing three meals for her 14 hours at school the next day, I reassure her that *it's my job* and I love to serve my family. It's not an easy job, but I prayed for this husband and these children, and it's a privilege to serve just like Christ came to serve us.



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