

Stealing a Few Parenting Techniques from the Bible

A few years ago we were looking around in a local book store when a rack of novelty items caught my four year olds eye.

“Daddy, Daddy... Look...” he exclaimed, grabbing a handful of my pants leg. A little key chain with a tiny jewel encrusted box attached had struck his fancy. “What’s dat?” he asked.

I snatched it from him to take a look. There appeared to be something inside. I unlatched it and out came the smallest little book I’d ever seen. With just the right squint I could make out the words on the cover, ‘Holy Bible’.

“Wow Joshua,” I exclaimed, “That’s cool!”

I went on to explain to him in some detail everything I knew about the marvels of modern printing techniques. He listened patiently for those 13 seconds.

“Can I have it? Can I have it?” he proceeded.

It warmed my heart to see him valuing the important things in life, so with a beaming smile I turned the trinket over to see the price.

“No, I don’t think so boy,” I barked, snapping back to my senses, “We got Bibles at home you can’t read.”

I tossed it back on the rack and rambled off to punch around the store some more. What was I supposed to do? They wanted \$2.95 for that cheap little thing.

Unfortunately, every time I came back around, Joshua was still standing there marveling over that little book. It was making me feel guilty, so finally I said, “Come on boy. Let’s get outta here.”

Don’t fret, we didn’t leave. Throwing thriftiness to the wind, I let him trudge off ahead of me and palmed one of those high dollar key chains. Once at the counter, I laid it down and stepped back to await his squeals of gratitude. It must’ve caught him off guard, because he just stood there with a bewildered look on his face.

“Isn’t that what you wanted Josh?” I asked.

“Uh huh,” he finally managed coyly, “Tank you Daddy.”

Joshua played with that thing all the way home. He must’ve asked me twenty questions about the Bible on the way.

“What are da Ten Commandos? Does God forgib you when you’re bad?” Yada yada yada... It was one of the most meaningful conversations we’d ever had; all for the low-low price of \$2.95. I was feeling like an awfully smart daddy.

As I was tucking the boy in bed a couple of nights later I noticed he was still sleeping with that keychain. I was about to tell him how proud I was of him when I noticed another identical key chain on his night stand.

“Josh!” I exclaimed, “Where did you get this?”

His little face went pale. He ducked under the covers in a manner that all but confirmed my most dreaded conclusions. The little booger had pocketed one of those Bibles before he realized I was going to buy him one. My four year old was a Bible thief!

For the next ten minutes I gave him the ‘what for’, complete with every scripture I could recall. He was really feeling bad, but I wasn’t through.

“Get dressed boy,” I said, “We’re going back to the store. You’re going to tell them what you did.”

My wife Angie, who’d been ease-dropping at the door, finally chimed in.

“But it’s a school night,” She reasoned, “Can’t you guys do it tomorrow?”

“Nope, gotta do it right now,” I fumed, “That’s how we teach him a lesson. I saw it on T.V.”

I dressed the boy and we sped off to reach the store before closing. I attempted to continue his guilt trip in the car, but he wasn’t really cooperating. He seemed to have gotten over the whole issue. He kept asking me what he deemed to be more important questions, like, “How long does it take to get to da moon?”

When we got to the store he did as we'd rehearsed. He strode solemnly up to the young cashier girl and said, "I stolt dis, I sorry."

She smiled warmly and replied, "Ohhh... Well, thanks for being honest sweetie. Did you want to keep it?"

I tried to flag her down, but she'd already succumbed to the charm of that cute little rascal. She did eventually agree to take my money for the keychain, but not before she'd loaded Josh down with a wad of suckers big enough to choke limb chipper. Obviously she hadn't seen that T.V. show!

I've had a couple of years now to look back on that night and contemplate how my heavenly Father would've handled it differently. Clearly He hates sin. He never overlooks it or tolerates it, but He also never beats you down after you've repented. His correction is always followed by encouragement- and when He forgives, He forgets. (*For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in His holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening-it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. Hebrews 12:10-11* NLT)

God knows what's best for each of us. I'm convinced God's response in little Joshua's case would've been somewhere between mine and the young cashier.

But anyway- In the end Joshua got to play with his new Bible keychain all the way home again- just like he'd done the first time... Somehow I feel he may've outsmarted me on this whole deal.

-Guy Sheffield 1-22-08