

Enjoying Your Kids While You Can
Pastor Steven J. Cole (WORLD, 6/14/97, under title, "Quantity quality time")

A couple of years ago, around the time of her sixteenth birthday, my middle daughter said to me, "Dad, do you remember how you used to take each of us somewhere special for our birthday, just time alone with you?" I remembered, of course. Not every year, but on three or four of the kids' birthdays, I had set aside a Saturday, or sometimes a Friday night through Saturday night, where just that child and I would do something together.

She continued, "Well, do you think that for my birthday we could go down to Sedona and look through some art galleries, since you and I both like doing that? And, maybe we could take a hike, too?"

"Sure," I said, "that sounds like fun!" And, just a few Saturdays later we were able to do just that.

That daughter graduates from high school this year. My oldest is half-way through college. My youngest, a son, is rapidly approaching driving age. I often wonder, "Where did those years go when I had young children?"

I do not regret for a minute that when my kids were young, even though I am a busy pastor, I was home most evenings to play with them, read them a story, and help tuck them into bed. I'm glad that every summer we have taken a family vacation together--nothing expensive, but just time together, camping, seeing God's beautiful creation. It's gone by too quickly, but we share some warm memories that bind us together.

One of the most important things you can do for your children is to give them your time and to *enjoy* being with them. Kids aren't dumb--they sense when you feel like they're a bother. They also sense when you genuinely *like them* and enjoy their company. You communicate your attitude toward them, in part, by little gestures: a warm smile, eye contact, a gentle nudge or hug, a shared laugh.

Just putting down what you're doing for a minute and giving them your undivided attention says, "You are important to me and I want to hear what you have to say." Even though what they want at the moment may not be an important issue, if you express a welcome response, it can open the way for communicating at other times on more important things, such as spiritual values and character issues. Influence is imparted through time together, genuinely enjoying their company.

I see so many parents, even in Christian families, and especially dads, who destroy their relationships with their kids by being perpetually angry. Their only communication toward them seems to be the high-decibel rhetorical question: "How many times do I have to tell you ...!!!" Or, their anger burns through with sarcastic remarks, name-calling, and put-downs: "Hey, stupid, use your head!" Sometimes they just shake their heads in disgust, communicating non-verbally, but unmistakably, to the child, "You're an idiot!" I've seen people in public places talk to their children in ways that wouldn't be appropriate for correcting your dog. Then, when the kids rebel as teenagers, the parents shrug their shoulders and say weakly, "It's just a normal phase they have to go through!"

The Bible commands us to put off such rotten speech, and instead use words that build up others. It tells us to put off anger and to be kind and tender toward one another (Eph. 4:29, 31-32). It specifically tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger, but rather to nurture them in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

In other words, we parents need to confront and deal with our own anger before God if we want to rear our children properly. The only way to do that is to trust in Christ as your Savior and Lord (Acts 16:31), confess your every sin to God (1 John 1:9), and continually submit all of your thoughts, words, and deeds to His lordship (Gal. 5:15-26).

"Dad, do you remember when ...?" Yes, of course, I remember. But the significant thing is that *she* still remembers and that she still wants to spend a day with dad. And as her dad, I truly *enjoy* spending a day with her! Take some time today, this week, this month, to enjoy your kids while you can. And, treat them kindly. They're God's special gifts, entrusted to your care for a few short years.