

# THE PERILS AND PASSIONS OF POSITIVE PARENTING

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**BRENT:** We are happy to be here. We are parents of 9 children. We decided to go for quantity not quality. Our biggest problem is that they are all girls but 7. Actually our fifth son is getting married in a couple of weeks and we are excited about that. We have 10 grandchildren and we are even more excited about that. When our son gets married we will have even more grandchildren, we hope.

A few days ago I received an email from a friend and he wrote about being a parent and raising children. He said "Number 1 - You spend the first 2 years of their lives teaching them to walk and talk and then you spend the next 16 years telling them to sit down and shut up". I thought that was good. "Number 2 - Grandchildren are God's reward for not killing your own children. Number 3 - Mothers of teens now know why some animals eat their young". Number 4 - Children seldom misquote you. Usually they repeat word for word what you should not have said. Number 5 - The main purpose in holding children's parties is to remind yourself that there are children more awful than your own. Number 6 - Even though you childproof your home, they will still get in. Number 7 - Be nice to your kids, they will choose your nursing home one day. And finally - If you have a lot of tension and you get a headache, do what it says on the Aspirin bottle "Take 2 Aspirin and keep away from children". I thought that was a great email to receive and I put it in my briefcase just to share it with you.

Today, we are going to start backwards. This first hour we are going to talk about being parents. If we were to draw 3 circles, the children would be in the outer circle. This afternoon we are going to talk about the marriage relationship and that's the next circle in and then finally we're going to talk about capturing your dreams, experiencing change from the inside out. That final lecture will be all about you as individuals. We are excited about the different flavour for each one of them.

In 1981 I received my doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy from Brigham Young University in Utah. Our 6 year old son Jeremy, was playing with the neighbour boy that very day and the neighbour boy said "Did your Dad become a doctor today?" "Yes he did". "Well, what kind of doctor is he?" Jeremy said, "He's the kind that doesn't do anybody any good". A year ago Margaret and I flew back to Virginia Tech where Jeremy received his doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy. We went golfing and you can imagine what I said. I waited until the first hole and I couldn't wait any longer and I said "Jeremy, I doubt you will ever do anyone any good, but congratulations anyway".

We have a lot of fun as a family. I would like to introduce Margaret to you at this time. It wouldn't be fair to ask her to fly all the way to Australia with her beautiful accent and not hear her talk. I will tell you that the first thing I noticed about her, that I fell in love with, was her ankles. We fell head over tea kettle in love. That was 37 years ago, September 17<sup>th</sup>. They've been long years for her and short ones for me and somehow we have survived to tell the tale.

**MARGARET:** Thank you very much. I'm just enjoying being here on this trip and enjoying your beautiful country. I'm grateful to be able to say a few things today about parenting. It is one of my favourite subjects and as a young grandmother it's a joy for me to try some of the concepts that worked for me as a mother and try these on my grandchildren. It gives us another chance and I do love that.

Not too long ago, I was kneeling in the flower bed pulling weeds. It's a constant problem, pulling weeds. It doesn't seem fair that the little plants are struggling along and the weeds are so hardy and strong. But as I was kneeling there weeding, a neighbour walked by and stopped to talk to me and said "What are you planting?" I felt so bad that I was not planting, that I was just weeding. The more I thought about this concept, the more profound it became and I realised that if I had just planted a little wiser, I wouldn't have so many weeds here.

This applies so well to family life too. **What are you planting in your families?** If I were to start all over again, I think **the first thing that I would want to plant is some ground cover that spreads quickly - and that would be unconditional love, because as it spreads it chokes out the weeds and they don't have a chance.** Every child deserves to be cherished. Think of the feelings that you had with your first child and how you instantly fell in love with this little person. That love grows but it also changes and sometimes when a 5 year old is doing something really naughty, we can forget to cherish. Through the years, I've kept scrapbooks with photos and recorded my feelings and thoughts about my children and reread those books and showed them to the children, it helped them to have that feeling again of being cherished. It was also a great reminder to me of how much I cherish them.

One of the best moments of all is when one of our children brings a friend home on a date and they get their book out and show them the picture book of their lives. I want to encourage you to keep scrapbooks and journals and record your experiences of family life. Keep a notebook handy and write down some of the cute things that your children say or do. Children are so quoteable and so are grandkids. This is one of the cute things that Josh said as a little boy. Brent was cutting his fringe and he said to Josh, "Close your eyes", so that he didn't get hair in his eyes, and then, "Close your mouth". And Josh said "Do you want me to close my nose too?"

The second thing I would like to plant in my garden is some **tall trees to give shade and protection. I call these my "twin towers" of trust and respect.** These are very important in family life. It is important for a child to feel that we trust them and for them to act trustworthy. How do we accomplish that? By trusting them and respecting them. Every child deserves to have a few things that are just their own and so we would have a little box with a lock on it that they could keep their private and special things in it. Of course there were times that they had to share but they didn't have to share everything. I remember one day when it was Donny's birthday, I was trying to get him to share his new birthday toys and it's so hard to share on your birthday. He said "Mummy, I just can't share. Maybe when I'm big and I'm a Daddy then I can share". He is the one getting married in a couple of weeks, and I hope that he has learned to share, because in marriage you share everything. One of the ways we have taught our kids to share and respect is to tell them that everything we have is theirs. That they can never steal from us because it's theirs already. We share with them.

Another thing I would like to plant in my garden is **beautiful flowers.** Flowers bring so much joy and happiness to our lives. I would like to call these flowers "**service**". Because a family that is service oriented is one that has peace and calm. **I've discovered through parenting, there is a universal law that we learn to love those whom we serve. Why is it that we love our children so much? Is it because of all they've done for us or is it because of all we've done for them and how much we've invested in them?** They deserve to learn the secrets of love which are - *we love as we serve.* So we would have love jobs and money jobs. The money jobs were pennies, dimes and nickels but the love jobs really taught them about service.

When Josh was about 5 years old he was complaining because I had asked him to set the table for the family and he thought that was too hard and that he couldn't do it. I helped him along and after a couple of days, he came to me and in the wisdom of youth said "Mummy, I think I love you more now that I'm helping you more". How true it is. The mother in the home can bring this spirit of service by asking our children one by one "what can I do to help you, what are your needs, how can I serve you?" This also works with teens. **I went to Jeremy, our teenager at the time and asked "How much do you love me Jeremy?" and he said "Lots". I said "Do you love me**

enough to clean the bathroom?” “Sure, that’s easy Mum”, and he did it without any complaining.

The fourth thing I would like to plant in my family garden is some **soft grass** to walk barefoot through and as part of the landscaping. I’d like to call that “**unity and togetherness**”. Sociologists have studied the most successful families and have found those qualities in these families that we can emulate. One of those important factors is that they spend *quality* time together and *quantity* time. We’ve been rationalising for years and saying “Oh I’m spending quality time” but **you can’t really give quality without giving some quantity**. Families that work together, stay together. Families that play together, stay together. Families that pray together, stay together.

Our children were involved in a lot of music and a lot of different musical instruments. So we would support each other by going to recitals. We’d support each other by going to ball games, and all of these give a feeling of unity. What a joy it is to me as a mother to see them pick up their instruments on Sunday afternoons and play their quartet music. It brings a lot of joy and satisfaction.

Our lives are a lot like gardens. Sometimes there are rainy days and it gets a little bit muddy and icky. Sometimes there are sunny days. But we should never give up, we have to keep trying. What works for one child in one situation, may not work for another. We have to continually be juggling and finding what works this time. **We need to spend a little more time on our knees as we are planting and ask for wisdom from above**. A great man once said “It’s easier to be the CEO of General Motors than to be a parent”. I’m sure all of you would agree.

**The values that we seek as a society are produced in a cottage industry within the walls of our home. They can’t be legislated, they can’t be taught in the schools, they can’t be hammered out in the factories or in day care centres or schools; they are produced in our homes.** The family is under attack and we need to do everything we can to defend and strengthen families and to plant wiser. **It is my hope that we will spend more time planting than weeding** and remember it’s never too late to plant. Thank you.

**BRENT:** I appreciate Margaret and the happiness that we have in our marriage. There have been a lot of studies throughout the world and they have found that marital happiness starts really high. We should be happy campers when we get married. But gradually over the family life cycle, marriage happiness goes down, down, down, down and then the kids leave home and it starts going back up and then we die. That’s the cycle of life for each one of us. Children really can do a lot to humble us.

Today I thought that I would share with you about 16 or 17 **be-attitudes about parenting** and positive parenting; things that have helped us.

Margaret, when she just concluded, mentioned wisely that we have to treat each child differently. We found out that there are nine different types of children. There are actually four different types of children in a birth order then a fifth child becomes a first child.

A first child usually struggles with being selfish, they are treated as an adult half the time, as a child half the time and if they have parents that are functioning well together then the oldest child really does have the capacity for greatness. They are pushed to the forefront a lot and so they accomplish a lot of great things. If the parents are struggling with each other, the first child usually struggles the most. They become the victims of a poor marriage.

The second child is a very sensitive child usually. They pick up on the pain of individuals and this really follows through with our second son. He is very much oriented towards feelings.

The third child is usually a very happy, gregarious person whose desire is only to please. They just want to please. They are kind of pushed into the background as they are growing up, so they are quick to serve. Jeremy is our third child and we appreciate that.

A fourth child is a child who is usually very feeling oriented as well and they can pick up on the pain of relationships. So if a parent and another child or if both parents are struggling, the fourth child can usually identify those emotions quite accurately. Now these things are not cast in stone, but they are valid often enough that they really are a pattern. Think of you in your own family and you'll probably identify some of those characteristics.

**The first be-attitude that I'd like to present is be patient.** I'll never forget when our fourth son Joshua was born, our eldest Jason was 5, Aaron was 4 and Jeremy was 3. We knelt down to have our family prayer. Jeremy always whispered when he said his prayers, and it was his turn to say the prayer, so he was whispering along and we think he may have been talking to Heavenly Father, we couldn't really tell because we couldn't hear his words, but about half way through his prayer, his four year old brother Aaron doubled up his fist and belted Jeremy in the mid section as hard as he could and said "Jeremy, you don't whisper when you pray, Heavenly Father can't hear you when you whisper!". I'll never forget Jason at age 5, he got up and went over and put his arm around Jeremy and his other arm around Aaron and said "Aaron, it's alright if he whispers, because Heavenly Father has bionic ears".

Well that leads to the second one - **be value-driven.** In our home that meant that we really did worship God and that prayer was really important. Jason taught me that day (even though I wanted to discipline Aaron for being so unruly) that this was a chance to reinforce that prayers really do get answered, that's why we offer them. Sometimes we become so sophisticated that we don't remember that. Anyway, being valued driven in whatever you believe in, let your children see that belief. What it boils down to, the way I like to look at it, is these are our values and these are our behaviours and when we live in an aligned state, that's behaviour, value, congruence, our children grow up not messed up. They really know what we stand for and what we believe.

The third beatitude is to **be humble and repent.** I'm hesitant to mention this, but I'm going to. Our second son came very contrary from the womb. I was there at all nine deliveries and I know they're our children, but Aaron really struggled from day one and as he grew up he had a very contrary spirit and we knew that. We didn't understand that children either live up to or down to their perception of what their parents think they are or who their parents think that they are. But at any rate he's the one that was always getting spanked, he was the one that was always misbehaving and when he was 6 years old, I had a near death experience for him, near murder.

He had misbehaved and I chased him down the hallway and I thought I needed to be wise about this. So I thought I would turn my foot sideways and tap him in the backside and just as I did, he dropped down and I caught him in the small of his back, I missed his backside. He screamed in pain, it was very painful and I sat down on the floor and I will never forget this, I took him in my arms and I repented. I told him I would never touch him again, that I would never spank him again and I realised that not only did I not like him but I didn't love him. It's very hard for me to admit that in front of a group of people, but those feelings had just been diminished and almost extinguished. I decided that from that hour forth, (Margaret struggled with him as well, it wasn't just me and our son), we decided that we were big enough that we would repent of the way we were treating him. So we began to act as if we liked him and we began to act as if we loved him. And so we decided to treat him as we did the other boys and as often as we could we would express those feelings. We gradually got him to repeat back to us as we said "Love you Aaron" (which we would say several times everyday) he eventually said "Love you too". It was when he and I were kneeling in prayer on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday after we'd had a special visit that hour and it was the first time I had heard him say "I sure love you Dad" and tears were streaming down his face and I said "I love you too Aaron" and I really meant it.

The irony is, Aaron is a father of three, he is 32 years old and he is very happy. I remember sitting with Margaret and thinking about what Aaron does that's good. We had a parakeet - he was

always sketching the parakeet. He was always running too, whenever he went to a friend's house. So we started telling Aaron that he was a runner, an athlete and that he was an artist. You would be interested to know that he grew up being a runner - he really ran the distances well. He became an artist and he's a professional artist today because he believed what we told him about who he was instead of who he wasn't. I can't even tell you how happy a person he is. I wish he was here on display today so you could see his smile. He spreads joy wherever he goes and we nearly blew it in terms of the way we were parenting him. So being humble enough to say we need to make some changes in how we are treating a child is invaluable.

The next beatitude is to **be consistent**. We decided that we would have a ritual on school mornings of getting up early at 6.30 in the morning and having a family devotional. That devotional included reading from the Bible and kneeling in prayer with the family. It also included setting our goals for the day. We did that most mornings, we're not perfect and we slept in sometimes. But we did that with love, waking the family and gathering together for 20 to 30 minutes. It really made a difference to us, feeling that we were in control as their parents. It made a difference for them too, that consistency, that ritual.

The next beatitude is to **be creative**. One day when our oldest son, who is 33 now, started talking back to Margaret, (she had invited him to mow the lawn). He said he didn't want to. He told her to "bite the wall" (a Utah idiom). I thought, "What can I do for Jason?" as I was just beginning to understand that the spirit leaves the body about age 14 or 15 and it doesn't re-enter the body until they get to be about 17 or 18. I was just watching the spirit leave Jason's body and I thought, "We've got to get creative here."

So I brought him into my den and I said, "Jason, let's form a partnership". He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Let's have a partnership for the rest of our lives". He said, "What does that mean?" I said, "That means that partners give everything they have to each other". So he said, "What do you have to give to me?" and I said, "Money". He said, "What do I have to give to you?" and I said, "Time, maybe sometimes money and sometimes I'll have time to give you". He looked at me and said, "That's a great idea Dad". I'll never forget his hand coming across my desk, he shook my hand and we formed that partnership. Then I said, "Now, do you have time to go and mow that lawn? If you don't, then I'll go and do it." And I would have; I love mowing the lawn. I didn't as a boy, but I do now. He said, "No, I've got time". It totally changed his attitude knowing that he was a partner.

Let me show you how this works. We begin as a parent if there is a Mum and Dad both in the home. We begin with vertical relationships and gradually as a child gets older and becomes a teenager, it becomes a bilateral relationship. Those parents who are successful parents will have their children grow into adulthood and marry and they will want to come back often. And they will want to bring their kids. They will want to have family activities. They will really reinforce that. However if a parent keeps a child in a vertical relationship and keeps putting the screws on them then a child will want to bolt just as soon as they can. They won't want to be around their parents. When each of our next 8 children turned 14, we formed a partnership with them before the spirit started leaving their body. I can't even tell you how many times that partnership worked. Let me just tell you one.

When our oldest son spent two years as a missionary for our church in Spain, he was coming home, when Josh had just purchased his own car. He was 2 weeks away from getting a driving license. He had spent his \$1000 which he had made mowing lawns and washing dishes in a café and so he had bought this car and was ready for his wheels and I said "Josh, your brother's coming home. He's going to need some wheels to go to college. Why don't you give your car to him? You really don't need it." Can you imagine a father asking his son to do that? But in the nature of our partnership, that was part of the conversation. He said, "Dad, I'd love to". (He truly did, he said those words!)

The next night at 11.30, we got home from the airport, we were standing in the kitchen and Josh handed Jason a set of keys and said, "Go look out in the garage". Out in the garage was this cute

little repainted car with a great big red bow all the way around the car. Jason said "What's this?" Josh said "It's your car, I bought it for you". Can you imagine the bond of love between Jason and Josh? I get emotional just thinking about it. **When you have a partnership mentality with your children, you never direct, you always invite a child to do something and then they feel like they can make their own choices.**

Margaret came to me one day and she said, "Brent, I'm really anxious because we have so many rules for our kids, I feel like I'm just a policeman." So I became creative. It's one of the few times in my life, and I said, "Why don't we have one rule?" She said, "What's that?" So I told her what the rule was.

So we gathered all our kids around us one morning at 6.30am and said, "**We have one rule in our house. Not a whole lot of rules like we used to have**". They said, "What's the rule?" I said, "**The rule is: there are no rules unless you break one**". They looked at me and they didn't quite understand what they were hearing and I said, "Doesn't that sound great, to have no rules except that one?!" This worked really well, but you have to start something like this when your children are really young. But what it does is it transfers the responsibility of their actions back to them, back to their shoulders instead of making the parents police everything that they did.

We didn't have any rules about what time they had to come home by at night, we always just asked them to be thoughtful. Sometimes, they weren't thoughtful and so we had talks about being more thoughtful. Other times they were, but they didn't grow up lying and learning to lie, because that's what happens when children are in a home with excessive rules - they will grow up learning to be deceitful and mischievous. They will do anything to get away with what they need to get away with. But if there are no rules to break, then they don't have to begin to lie. So you might ask "What do you have if you don't have rules?" You have guidelines. Let me illustrate.

When Jason was almost 16, we had implemented a guideline because our church leaders in our particular religion had said "Don't date until you're 16". So we had implemented that and asked our kids to do that. We came home one night, it was Halloween and there was a big, giant pumpkin sitting on our front porch and a girl had just asked Jason out to a Halloween dance. She was 17 and he was nearly 16. She said "Carve this pumpkin with a smile if the answer is yes and with a frown if the answer is no". He was about 6'2, he looked down at me and said, "Dad, do we have a rule that you don't date until you're 16?" I said, "No we don't, but we have a guideline. We have a guideline to do what our church leaders have asked us to do". And he said, "Well, how can I get out of it?" I said, "Why don't you carve it with a smile on one side and a frown on the other and tell her you will take a raincheck until after you're 16". And so he did. And a few months later he took her to a barbecue which the young people in the neighbourhood were having and they had a great time.

Fifteen months went by and Aaron came home, he was turning 16 on March 20<sup>th</sup>, and he'd been invited to a Valentine's Day dance at the High School and he looked down at me (he was 6'3) and said, "Do we have a rule that we don't date until 16?" I said "No, just a guideline". He said, "How do I get out of it?" I said, "Tell her you'll take a raincheck, if you want to get out of it". And so he did.

Fourteen months went by and Jeremy was one month away from turning 16. His voice had just dropped an octave and he came home one day from school and he said, "Dad, I've been grabbed". I said "You what!!" and he said, "Well, at school, they have this grab dance and the girl grabs you in the hall and if they grab you then you have to take them to the dance and that's tonight and I got grabbed". I didn't know whether to get excited for him or nervous. It was kind of a thrill for him. Anyway, at 15 and 11 months, he took a raincheck as well. Nobody asked any of our other kids out before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. So that's learning to be consistent and creative.

Another thing is to **be there**. Be at the crossroads. I was so grateful that Margaret didn't have to go out to work. She's the hardest worker I've ever known, but she was always there for the kids. When they left for school, when they came home from school, she was there for them. I tried to be

as often as I could. But time and circumstance -. people excuse themselves by saying it's the quality of time that counts, that's an excuse. It's really the quality and quantity of time that counts.

The next one is to **be considerate**. I had a friend in Chicago whose boy came home one day and he said, "I want you to mow the lawn". He was with his friends and he said, "I can't Dad, I'm on my way to the mall". He said, "If you go out that door, keep going because you're no longer welcome in this house". He said it just like that. The boy kept going and that week he got a girl pregnant. He came back home when he found out that she was pregnant and then they got married and then they got divorced. I was in that boy's home down in Texas, about a month ago. He is really a neat guy, but struggled in the way he started out because he had a father who was an authoritarian father. So learning to be considerate with our children is very important. I'm going to come back to that in a minute.

The next thing is to **be trusting**. When Josh turned 14, our next door neighbour was 15 and on drugs. One Friday night, Josh said, "I'd like to go with Kevin and his friend over to another friend's house and spend the evening." Now we knew that Kevin had struggled with drugs and yet he was our next door neighbour and who were we not to invite our kids to help those people who were struggling? I said, "Josh, are the parents going to be there?" He said, "Yes they are" and I said "Then go, but put an antenna up. You have a conscience; you are able to discern if something goes wrong and the parents will be there, so go have a good time. Let Kevin know what a great evening is without drugs. If something goes wrong, call us up and tell us that you're not feeling well, then we will come and pick you up". At 9.15 pm the phone rang and it was Josh. He said, "Dad, I'm not feeling well can you come pick me up?" I said, "Yes, your Mum can come and get you". So she did. Then he spent 2 hours lying between us in bed, until midnight, as we talked about what happened. 9.05pm the parents left. At 9.10 pm three people showed up, and there were some drugs involved. Josh got out. I said, "Josh, I'd trust you with my life". Be trusting. If your children think that you trust them and respect them, they will live up to it.

The next thing is to **be proactive**. The illustration that I'd like to give is to have sharing sessions with your kids. It seems that we were always gathering together, eating popcorn or something, but they didn't know that it was staged, but it was always to share information back and forth. Now a family system is semi-permeable. Think of a baby in a mother's womb and that sack that goes around. That can be penetrated with a needle; in fact surgery can actually take place on that foetus before birth. But a womb is semi-permeable, not much can get in and not much can get out. A healthy family system is also semi-permeable. Where family secrets are not betrayed and shared, where children can feel safe that their struggles and what's happening to them are not just shared willy-nilly with everybody in the neighbourhood. It's a great thing to be proactive. **Before children can feel love from their parents, they have to feel safe.** When they feel safe and secure in that environment, that semi-permeable environment, then they can experience love.

The next thing is to **be authoritative**. There are 3 types of parents in the world - those who are authoritative, those who are coercive or authoritarian and those who are permissive. If you're a parent, you are one of those 3 types. Someone who is authoritative directs the process of good and well being in the home. I love those three words – **direct the process**. A wise father doesn't make all the decisions. In fact, in my home I suspect that Margaret makes 75% of the decisions and I make maybe 10 – 15% and we make together, 10 – 15%. But the head of the home has a responsibility to direct the process. That's why, early in the morning I'm the one in among the bedrooms inviting our kids to come and get together. Being a father is an exciting thing because children really listen. Being a mother is frustrating because children hardly ever listen. They hear that voice so often.

Another thing that we decided to do in our home was to **be "pixie-ish"**. (I don't know how else to say it). We decided that we would have a pixie mentality. That meant that we did things for each other, like picking up each others things. Ten years into our marriage, I decided that I would be the guy that did the vacuuming. I used to own a custodial service while I was in college and I loved to vacuum and make beautiful designs in the carpet. So I decided to be our family vacuumer. It wasn't her job that I took, it was just something new that happened. I decided that I needed to be

more involved. When I came home at the end of a day, probably 5 days out of 7, and that's not exaggerating, sometimes twice a day, I would get out the vacuum and invite the kids to go ahead of me picking up things and so in about 10 or 15 minutes we could straighten up and restore sanity to their mother and to her life that she had been trying to restore all day. It's amazing what a man can do if he picks up a vacuum and says "go ahead".

"Pixie" each other and take care of each other without anybody knowing who did it. Be demonstrative, be expressive. **The greatest thing that a father can give his children is to hug and kiss them and tell them that he loves them several times a day.** Mothers do it naturally, and I would hope that each of us men would do that. Finally, be kind and be forgiving. When our children make mistakes and go against the guidelines that we have, forgive them. We don't always have to be punitive, we need to be consistent, but we don't always have to follow through with the punishment. By the way, physical punishment is almost always a negative reinforcement, i.e. it is counter-productive.