

Fight of Your Life | Fight for Your Kids

Aaron Brockett | 1 Kings 2:2-12

All right, how is everybody doing today? It is good to see you. It's so good to be with all of you today, and I want to welcome all guests and first-time visitors. We are thrilled you are here and we'd love to give a great big shout out to each and every one of our campuses so for North, Downtown, West, all of you online, those of you here at our Northwest campus.

I'm hearing great reports these days as to what God is doing at all of our campuses. We are so glad to have you.

If you were here last weekend, Petie got us kicked off in a great four-part series of messages we are currently in, with a bit of an ominous title called *The Fight of Your Life*.

I'm ashamed to admit this, but I've only been in one fistfight in my entire life. Let me be clear, I am ashamed that I've been in a fistfight, not that it's only been one.

But it was actually my ninth-grade year in high school and it was with one of my very best friends. His name is David. David lived down the street from me. We'd been really close in middle school and junior high, but in our ninth-grade year of high school we started to drift apart. It's not uncommon in adolescence. I can't even tell you all the reasons why; it just was happening.

Because of that, it created some tension in our friendship. One afternoon we were in David's backyard—a whole bunch of neighborhood boys got together. We were playing backyard football, but it was full-on, contact, tackle football, which, looking back on it, probably wasn't the wisest decision. David was guarding me and the tension boiled over between the two of us. He looked at me and he called me a name.

That made me mad, so I said something about his mom that I can't repeat to you today. But it was a good one. And then David comes running at me and blindsides me with a haymaker to my right eye. And it was on. All the neighborhood boys circled up and they were like, "Fight, fight."

David and I kind of circled each other, doing this kind of thing. The whole fight lasted maybe 60 seconds or less. A few more punches were thrown and none of them landed. It's safe to say I have zero future in the UFC. And I walked away out of the backyard with wounded pride and a black eye.

I remember walking home. My mom was in the kitchen making dinner that night. I didn't want her to see my face. She saw my black eye and she freaked out. She said, "What happened to your eye?" I was like, "Well, I got into a fistfight." She really panicked and asked, "With who?" I think she was thinking maybe it was a new kid who moved into the neighborhood or something.

When I told her it was David, she was really beside herself because David had been one of my good friends. David had been over to our house a lot.

So after dinner she and my dad called David's parents. They just lived down the street from us. They invited them over—to my dismay. I remember they rang the doorbell and David and his mom walked in. We couldn't even look at each other. We sat down in the living room and our parents made us sit there until we talked it out. It was excruciating.

Looking back on it, it actually took more courage and more energy for David and me to have the conversation than it did for us to have the fistfight. That's usually the case. When it comes to the people we love and care for in our lives, maybe there is some tension or disagreement of some kind. It's easier to maybe write that person off or throw a few verbal attacks than it is to actually fight for the relationship.

So this is true in what we talked about last weekend with marriage. It's going to be true in what we talk about next weekend with friendship, but it's also true in what we want to talk about today when it comes to parenting. I want to broaden that out a little bit—the parent-child relationship and the child-parent dynamic regardless of how old you are.

I want to go ahead and say I realize not everybody in the room right now listening to this is a parent. Some of you may not see yourself as ever being a parent. Maybe you really want to be a parent and for whatever reason this just hasn't happened for you. I just want to acknowledge that not everybody is in the same position.

So you hear a sermon on parenting and it's easy to want to write it off. I just want you to know that you more than likely had two people who brought you into the world. This relates to us. Maybe there are going to be some nieces and nephews, some young people in your life. God is your heavenly Father, so there are some things we want to talk about today that apply to all of us regardless of who we are. But I do want to speak specifically to parents and kids in the room.

And this dynamic is unique, it's a blessing, and it is presented with a whole bunch of challenges. For starters, as parents you don't get to pick the personality of your kids. Sometimes you wish you could. It's like, "If I could just have a website, www.buildyouroworkid.com and type in all the characteristics I would like for them to have, and then out they come."

That's just not the case. They are so unique, so different. My wife, Lindsay and I, have four kids. They are great kids. We have a boy and three girls—15, 13, 11, and 6. They are just amazing. All the time I have people come up to me, "I just met your daughter today. You can tell she is a Brockett." If you're around them long, you know they came from the same litter.

But there are some unique qualities to each one of them. It blows my mind as a dad to see we are raising four kids under the same roof, with the same set of values, and they even have the same experiences, yet what works for one doesn't necessarily work for the others. That definitely keeps you on your toes. Parenting is not one size fits all. We've got to tailor it to each particular child.

Now to be fair, they didn't get to pick us either. So as parents we maybe have personality traits our kids have to endure as well. The point is that when it comes to who your parents are, or who your kids become, much of the time we just don't have a say in it. This presents a whole bunch of challenges, especially to those of you who are new parents right now. Here are some statistics.

56% of parents lack confidence in their parenting

71% of parents struggle to find the time to enjoy activities with their kids

80% wanted more information about how to improve their relationship with their kids

"62% of parents we interviewed define successful parenting as 'having done the best they could, regardless of the outcomes.'" —George Barna

I guess that is okay, but your kids aren't a casserole. "Well, we'll just see how this turns out." And it kind of reminds me of what some of these celebrities have said about parenting.

"Like all parents, my husband and I just do the best we can, hold our breath, and hope we've set aside enough money for our kid's therapy." —Michelle Pfeiffer

"Sometimes I feel unqualified to be a parent. I call those times being awake." —Jim Gaffigan

I can relate to all that. I just want to acknowledge that there may be some of you in the room who are grown adults. And you just had fantastic parents. Maybe your parents are no longer in the picture, maybe they've passed away. But you look at that and say, "I'm so thankful for my mom and my dad. They made some sacrifices and they gave us opportunities. They introduced us to Jesus."

If that's your story, you shouldn't feel bad about that. We want to celebrate that with you. It is amazing. Some of you, you've had kids and you're loving the whole process. Psalm 127:3 says, "Children are a blessing and a gift from God." So we celebrate that with you.

I also know that this particular subject comes with a whole lot of potential mines we can step on. I know there is a lot of emotional pain when it comes to this particular subject. It's interesting to me that the people who can oftentimes cause us the greatest amount of emotional pain in our lives can be the two people who either brought us into the world, or the people we brought into it.

So I don't know if you can identify with any of these statements or not, but maybe some of you had a mom or dad who growing up were not emotionally available to you. Maybe you have a child right now who requires so much from you, but is unable to give anything back. Maybe your parents abandoned you, or they hurt you. Maybe your kids demand more that you can provide. Maybe you don't talk to your parents much anymore since you moved out, since that disagreement where some really hurtful words were spoken that can never be taken back.

Maybe you couldn't make time for your kids when they were younger, and now that they're older they are not willing to make much time for you. Maybe your parents are aging right now. They are getting older, and time feels like it's running out. There are some things you really need to say and you are trying to muster up the courage to say them.

Maybe your teenager right now is rebelling. They are saying some incredibly hurtful things. You just have a very difficult time identifying with them in any way or finding common ground. Maybe your parents don't approve of your spouse or the choices you are now making as an adult. Maybe your kids make fun of the clothes you wear. Maybe your dad, no matter how much you ask him not to, keeps bringing up his political views at the Thanksgiving meal. It just embarrasses you every year.

Maybe your 30-year-old son still lives in your basement, and if he is here today don't look at him. Maybe your parents, after 25 years of marriage you thought was happy, call you in your college dorm to tell you they are getting a divorce. Maybe your teenage daughter comes home to tell you she is pregnant. Maybe your mother still makes you feel like a helpless girl, even though you are 35 years old with family and a career of your own.

Maybe your grown child gets into trouble with the law again. You have a hard time figuring out if you should let them face those consequences or bail them out.

I don't know if any of you can relate to any of those statements but, if you can, you are in good company with King David. Like Petie said last week, if your impression of all the people in the Bible is that they had it all together and they are perfect, you need to look at King David's story because he made some significant mistakes in his life.

And yet that is one of the reasons why I really love David so much. He had these moments of greatness, moments where he was faithful, yet other moments where he wasn't. And yet, he is still described as a man after God's own heart. That gives me great hope in my life because I have great intentions, I want to be faithful, I want to do what God asks me to do. Yet I can identify with Paul when I say, "Sometimes I don't want to do things I keep doing."

God says, "My grace is enough to cover you, and I can actually redeem any bad decision that you make."

In 1 Kings 2, if you have a Bible or a Bible app I want to encourage you to meet me there in it. If you don't have one, I will put the passages that we're going to walk through together on the monitor beside me.

Let me give you a little bit of context for what we're getting ready to read together. David is an old man at this particular point. He is on his deathbed, so to speak, and he summons one of his kids to come in to see him. He's got more than one, which makes it interesting to me that he only asked one to come in to see him. I don't know if that says anything at all about the relationship he has with the others.

David is there on his deathbed. He has some things he wants to say to his son, Solomon. And what David says reveals a lot about the kind of dad he was, both the good and the bad. Let's start with the good beginning in verse 2. David says this to Solomon.

"I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take **courage** and be a man. Observe the requirements of the Lord your God, and **follow** all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be **successful** in all you do and wherever you go. If you do this, then the Lord will keep the promise he made to me. He told me," and now this is in quotes so it is a reference to something God said to David a long time ago. You can read it in Psalm 132.

"God says to David, 'If your descendants live as they should and follow me faithfully with all their heart and soul, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.'"

Now so far in this particular talk, this sounds like a pretty good father-son deathbed conversation. If they were to make a movie about this I can totally see Denzel Washington cast into the role of David, can't you? Just Denzel doing that thing that he does when he says something so powerfully. That's the best Denzel I have. That's really sorry. I apologize.

This is pretty good. He's giving his son some counsel before he passes away, and then he throws this last statement in at the very end of verse 4. I can't help but think David throws this in because he is still holding on to hope that this is going to happen, but he is wondering if it will. Not because God can't be depended upon, but because David is not very dependable as a father and he knows time is running out so he is trying to speak to this particular issue.

There appears to be, if you know anything about David's story, kind of a veiled desperation here in verse 4. It's almost like he is saying to Solomon, "Solomon, you're my last hope here. The other kids aren't here. They won't talk to me. I need you to redeem the family, Solomon. I need you to clean up this mess. If God's going to keep his promise, if God's going to bless our family, then I need you to fix what I broke. No pressure.

And then in verse 5, David loses his mind. He just takes us to crazy town. I wish he would have stopped after verse 4, but he doesn't.

"**And there is something else.** You know what Joab son of Zeruah did to me when he murdered my two army commanders, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He pretended that it was an act of war, but it was done in a time of peace, staining his belt and sandals with innocent blood. Do with him what you think best, but don't let him grow old and go to his grave in peace."

Some of you are going, "Did David just tell him to do what I think he told him to do?" The answer is yes. He just told him to send this guy Joab to take a dirt nap. That's what he told him. It gets worse. He goes on and says this.

“Be kind to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead. Make them permanent guests at your table, for they took care of me when I fled from your brother Absalom.” That’s a whole other story we’ll get to in a minute. “And remember Shimei son of Gera, the man from Bahurim in Benjamin. He cursed me with a terrible curse as I was fleeing to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan River, I swore by the Lord that I would not kill him. But that oath does not make him innocent. You are a wise man, and **you will know how to arrange a bloody death for him.**”

Live well my son. David has just gone from Denzel Washington to Marlon Brando. He might as well have told him to cut off the head of a horse and stick it in the guy’s bed or something. What are you doing here? David is defensive here, he is angry, sort of controlling, and he is telling his son to do some things he shouldn’t do.

What I love about the next couple of verses is that they give us hope that even in the midst of David’s bad fathering, God is still in control of all this.

“Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. David had reigned over Israel for forty years, seven of them in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. Solomon became king and sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.”

This is showing us that God’s grace and God’s ways are bigger than our faults as parents. I’m really, really thankful for that, aren’t you? I think when it comes to our responsibilities as parents it is very easy for each and every one of us to fall somewhere on this continuum right here.

overbearing <—> uninvolved

It’s very, very easy to fall on this line of this continuum. We definitely see David doing that. David’s words here to his son, Solomon, show us he can have a bit of an overbearing nature. David, throughout his life, had a history of trying to control things going all the way back to his interaction with Solomon’s mother Bathsheba, if you know anything about that story.

We see this coming out with his kids. As parents it’s very natural for us to want, especially with our first child, our eldest child, there is a lot of pressure on us to provide for them, to make sure they are protected, to make sure they have some experiences we didn’t have growing up. What ends up happening is in an effort to want to protect our kids, provide for our kids, and insulate our kids we become overbearing and may not even see it.

So this happens maybe when our kid doesn’t get enough playing time on the ball field until we yell at the coach. Or maybe they don’t get the grade we think they deserve, so we take it out on the teacher. Or they don’t live up to our expectations of them so we are constantly putting pressure on them. It created this weight our kids were never meant to carry.

Many times, as parents, it’s easy for us to put our kids and how they are doing at the very center of our value as individuals. Our affection and attention gets placed upon our kids. For all practical purposes

we end up worshiping our kids. I know that may sound kind of strange and you're like, "I never worship my kids. I've never bowed down and sung their praises." But that's not what worship is.

Worship is anything you've centered your attention and affection on. I'll tell you now, even at an early age, your kids can feel that and that is a weight your kids were never meant to carry. Being overbearing can come out in a variety of different ways. I've got a bunch of examples as a dad, but I'll just share with you one.

I asked my son's permission to share this. He is 15. I have to do that now. It used to be I didn't have to ask his permission to use him as an illustration in sermons, but now I do. So I asked him if I could use this. He just recently got his driver's permit, so he is trying to log some hours in the car with us to prepare for him turning 16 and getting his license.

He's been mostly driving in the car with his mom. A few weeks ago the three of us were together and he said, "Hey, can I drive home?" So I pulled in the parking lot. I could tell that immediately he was nervous, more nervous that I'm usually used to seeing him. He gets in the driver's seat, I'm in the passenger seat, and Lindsay is in the back seat.

He is taking an inordinate amount of time to adjust his seat and mirrors. Like we're saying, "Son, within this 24-hour period we need to get home." I put a little pressure on him to get going, which I could tell just tensed him up a little more. He gets on the road and approaches one of the roundabouts. And there are no cars going around it, it is a yield sign, and he comes to a complete stop.

I immediately said, "Son, you don't need to stop. It's a yield." And he said, "What's a yield?" Right then the car behind us just laid on his horn, which set me off. You can honk at me, no big deal. But if you honk at my son I automatically get defensive. So I rolled down the window and gave the guy a dirty look. I just about got into my second fistfight ever.

And then immediately I am rolling up the window. "I hope he doesn't go to our church." Welcome to my world. So all that it served to do is tense my son up even more and, as my wife would tell me later, "Modeled for him road rage," which we don't want.

We are heading home. There is a little bit of road construction and there is a stop sign. He didn't see it. It was hidden behind some cones and hard to see. He missed it. He just rolled through it and I was like, "Son, there is a stop sign there. You've got to pay attention." He is just shutting down.

We finally get near the driveway. He gets out, gives me the keys, and mutters something under his breath like, "That was the worst drive ever," and goes upstairs. I'm just kind of like sitting there. I look at my wife and she was doing one of these. After 19 years of marriage, I know what that means. She said, "Aaron, he wants to impress you so bad, and you just can't see it." She was like, "He was trying so hard to show you he knows what he is doing and you were being overbearing. It was creating a lot of pressure for him. You need to talk to him."

And she was right. That is just one example. I wish I only had one. One of the real challenges, and some of you can relate to this, is I almost found it to be easier to be a father when my kids were really, really little and you just had to do things for them. Now I was more stressed out and tired. But I didn't necessarily have to think so much. I was like, "Okay, your diaper needs to be changed. I'm going to change it." We did it. You are dry. I am a good dad.

You're hungry. I'm going to feed you. Are you full? All right, I am winning.

Now it is super, super-challenging because your kids develop opinions and sometimes their opinions are different than yours. They have emotions and feelings. As a dad, I am really finding that as they grow older I have to discern how much I should let go. I can't hold on too long. I can't let go too early. That requires a great deal of wisdom.

Some of us, maybe we want to follow Mark Twain's advice for parenting. Remember what he said? "When your kids turn 13, put them in a barrel and feed them through a hole. When they turn 16, plug up the hole."

There are moments when I want to put my kids in a barrel, but not because I don't want to be around them, but because I want to protect them. I want them to stay small. There was a day not that long ago when that 15-year-old boy was looking up at me doing this, and he doesn't do that anymore. And if he did, it would be weird. But I miss those days.

The thing is, the goal of parenting is not to keep your kids small and dependent upon you; the goal of parenting is to prepare this individual to be the person God created them to be and to prepare them for everything life is going to throw at them. When we are overbearing, when we try to live vicariously through them, when we try, even subconsciously, to keep them dependent upon us, we stifle them. We hinder them. We hold them back from who God wants them to be and what he has planned for them.

And I don't think any of us would want this, but sometimes it is a blind spot for us. We've got to ask for some wisdom and discernment. We've got to ask others to tell us what they see.

And so here are a few wisdom principles you may want to apply. You can pull out your phone and take a picture of these or write them down and just kind of spend some time thinking about it.

I'll go through them quickly.

Establish boundaries and then let them **run**.

So give them some boundary lines, but then let them make some decisions within them.

Be **firm** yet **forgiving**.

Clarify **expectations** yet be **safe**.

Don't **bail** them out every time.

Maybe the best thing you can do as a mom or a dad is to let them face the consequences regardless of how painful it may be for them or you.

Model for them what you'd like to see from them.

In other words, walk the walk and don't just talk it. And give them the freedom to fail.

A long time ago Lindsay and I agreed that these four little people growing up in our house are not our kids. We love them. We'll do anything for them. But they're not our kids, they are God's kids who he has placed on loan to us for 18, hopefully no more than 22, years or so. And the way we raise them will either prepare them for life or hold them back.

I think for some of us it's not the overbearing that is our issue. Maybe we fall on this other side of the continuum. I know I have. It is to be a little bit checked out or uninvolved in the life of our kids. We see this in the life of David.

These two kind of mirror each other, or one causes us to overreact to the other side. I think we see that in David's life. His inclination to be overbearing here at the end of his life with Solomon was because there was a time early on when he was largely checked out with his kids.

You can read all about it in 2 Samuel 13, but I'll go ahead and warn you, it's pretty graphic. It's pretty disturbing. I'll just keep it PG but David has a daughter named Tamar and she has a half-brother, one of David's other sons, named Amnon. He becomes infatuated with his half-sister and he ends up forcing himself upon her. Her brother, Absalom, one of David's other boys, is just thrown into an outrage largely because David doesn't do anything.

Absalom goes on a complete terror where he rips the family apart. All of it ends in his eventual death. The whole scenario runs like five chapters long, so it's a huge saga in the life of David's family. And David just seems to be checked out. You don't hear much from him, he does not intervene. He just seems to be on the sidelines. And I can't help but wonder why.

And I wonder if one of the reasons why is when he hears what's happened it maybe strikes too close to home and reminds him of what he had done with Bathsheba all those years ago. Because it was very, very similar.

I wonder if David is sitting there thinking to himself, "Who am I to say anything? Who am I to intervene? My kids know about my past. I've lost all credibility with them." And so he does nothing.

And it's ironic and it's tragic that David had all these incredible victories on the battlefield, and yet he couldn't win at home. If he had only fought as fiercely and courageously for his kids as he had against that giant name Goliath all those years ago, I can't help but wonder if that would have changed things.

And maybe for you right now as a parent, your challenge isn't that you are too involved right now in the life of your kids. Maybe your challenge is you're not involved enough. And maybe there are some reasons for this. There are some excuses. Things are really crazy at work right now. Maybe your job requires you to travel a lot and you say, "I'm providing for them. I'm giving them the life I never had."

Maybe you are divorced or separated and you have a blended family right now, and you don't get to see your kids as often as you like. Maybe you have this overriding sense of inadequacy due to some of your past failures so you feel like it stripped you of any sort of credibility to speak into the life of your children. So you find yourself being checked out with your kids more than you like or more than you know.

There was a study done a few years ago that revealed that 4 percent of teenage girls in America feel they can safely approach their fathers to discuss serious problems they were facing in their lives. In fact, the poll in USA today indicated that when teens face some sort of crisis, the first place they run to for comfort is music. The second thing is their friends. The third is social media, and moms and dads are way down on the list.

And you know, we could go teens will be teens, or parents just don't understand or whatever. That may be true to some extent but, as parents, we need to let our kids know we are available, we are approachable, even if there is a period of time they think it is un-cool to do so.

And the only way to do that—approachability is spelled this way: TIME. And it's this idea that I'm going to be available and carve out large blocks of time. Life gets busy on a day-to-day basis so I'm going to fight to carve out time for my kids so they know they are the priority.

And so we can't just do parenting in a matter of a few minutes of the day. Parenting requires large blocks of time.

Next month is the Indianapolis 500. I love that race but the thing I like most about the race is watching the pit crews when they come roaring into the pit stops. You just see this whole synchronized effort where you've got one person who comes in and jacks up the car, the other one who takes off the wheels and puts on the new ones, and somebody else who tops off the tank and makes adjustments to the wing. And they service the car in 15 seconds or less and it is on its way.

What's so impressive when it comes to the Indianapolis 500 is not nearly as admirable when it comes to parenting. And I've certainly been guilty of being a pit-stop parent. It's kind of like, "Hey, checking in with you. What do you need? You need \$20? Here is \$20. You had lunch today? Yeah, we're good. How was your day today?" Their answer is always, "Good," and I've got to press. It's always like, "Fine."

"Okay, tell me what was good about it." And I've got to make sure I spend a little more time with my kids and not just see them in passing. I would never want them to be going through something and just never say anything to me because they think I don't have the time for them or I was too preoccupied, too grumpy, or it was just uncomfortable to bring it up.

The demands and the challenges that are placed upon me around here on a regular basis are pretty heavy at times. I love it, I love what I do and I hope to do it a really long time, but oftentimes it's easy for me to take some of those challenges home. I can be preoccupied so I am there physically, but I'm not there emotionally or mentally.

I know many of you know what that is like. Many of you have careers that are highly demanding with high pressure. So I thought to myself, "If I don't get really intentional about this, it will never happen." I just kind of wrote out this manifesto for me. This is not what I'm doing perfectly, it's what I'm aspiring to do. It is the target for me.

Maybe some of you can adapt this to yourselves and maybe make a few tweaks to fit you. But this was my manifesto.

I set the spiritual direction in our home. I make it a safe place emotionally through my demeanor and speech. I give the best of my energy, focus, and passion at home and not just spend it all at work. I pray with and for my kids. I practice what they hear me preach. I will not be some phony preacher who is a totally different guy at home than I am on stage. I regularly evaluate my fathering by asking my wife and my kids, "How I am doing?" And I listen to their feedback without getting defensive. I share what they give me permission to with my group and let these men hold me accountable.

I decided a long time ago that as a father and a pastor, I have a significant challenge from the fact that I did not want my kids to grow up to be bitter preacher's kids who thought their dad loved the church more than them, or that their dad gave the church the best of his efforts, more than he gave to them.

I decided a long time ago that when I'm at church I'm going to look normal. I'm going to dress as normal as I can. I don't want to speak in that preacher's voice. I just want to be as real as I possibly can when I am on stage so that when my kids listen to me preach they see the same guy they see around the kitchen table at home.

I want them to know I really believe this stuff, and it's not just an act. That doesn't mean there aren't plenty of times when I have to go home and say, "I really messed up, didn't I? And I need for you to give your dad some grace. I really messed up there and I want to learn from it and grow."

It means a ton to me when, in raising our kids around here, if any of you know me and know anything at all about preacher's kids or PKs, and I know some of you are one, either the PKs love the church, love Jesus, and are really well-centered human beings, or they're not. And they are angry and bitter.

Some of that is on the pastor or the parents, and some of that is on the church. The church puts pressure on those kids to know more than they should or to act a certain way. I want to thank you as a church for not doing that to our kids. This is a great place to raise our kids.

I have adults in this church who know our kids who will take interest in them and speak words to them that maybe right now I can't, because I am their dad and it's not necessarily cool for them to hear it from their dad. But you'll speak words of courage, faith, and hope into them.

When my son went with me to Peru a couple of weeks ago, there were a couple leaders here from church and the directors from Stadia and Compassion. And they were constantly rushing to sit next to Conor at dinner. And they were constantly asking him questions about school, sports, and girls. "Conor, what do you think about those home visits?" and letting him speak into it.

And they were actually speaking things into him. "Hey Conor, I really noticed you are good at that." Or, "Hey Conor, what do you think God wants to do in your life?" I could see my boy come to life in those moments.

When I was growing up I had two or three friends, and every time I was in their home their fathers were like speaking words of courage and faith into me. They were like, "Hey Aaron, I can tell that God has gifted you in some things that you're going to take and God is going to use you in tremendous ways throughout your life." They were calling some things out in me that I didn't even know were there.

That's one of the powers of the local church community and being involved. If you have young kids, our Kid's Ministry is designed to help equip you to be the primary influence in your kids' spiritual growth and development.

I want to be really, really clear that our Kid's Ministry is not you outsourcing their spiritual growth and development to us. That's on you. We're there to equip you to do what God's called you to do. We have one hour with your kids every week; you have 168.

I know that sounds a little intimidating, so we want to come alongside you and give you some confidence to do that. Our Kid's Ministry team has developed some great content that is age appropriate, ideas for you to use in the car with your kids and have a conversation at bedtime, dinner, just daily conversations where you can run point on pointing your kids to Jesus. You can check all that out on tpcc.org/parentconnect.

Here's where I want to land on this continuum. It's not being an overbearing mom or dad and it's not being uninvolved. We want to find ourselves in this region right here.

overbearing <—[**prayerful & intentional**]—> uninvolved

Now notice I said intentional, not prayerful and perfect—there is no such thing. But prayerful and intentional, where we are on our knees regularly praying for our kids. That we are as intentional as we can be with them, knowing the best things that we should do for their future development.

I like how Andy Stanley says it. He says, "Your most significant contribution to the Kingdom of God may not be anything you do, but someone who you raise."

I also know right now that maybe for a number of you, this is really painful. Maybe you are in the midst of a season with your kids that is really challenging or maybe your kids are grown and gone and you're not very close anymore. And you're like, "I thought I did the best I could, but looking back I really made some mistakes. And I just wonder if our relationship can be redeemed. I wonder if we can be closer than we are."

I know some of you, you were really hoping I wasn't going to read this verse, but I'm going to throw it in there—Proverbs 22:6.

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Some of you don't like that verse. You thought you did, but they aren't. "We did everything we could," or "We raised two kids in the same house and one of them loves Jesus and one of them is far from him. What did we do wrong?" I'm just telling you that you did not do anything wrong. They are making their own decisions and their own choices.

And you can't control them anyway. They are not robots. But you can be prayerful and you can be intentional, but that never changes regardless of their age. You stay prayerful. You stay intentional. And you trust that God loves your kids even more than you do, and he is in control.

A couple of weeks ago I was having dinner with one of the directors of Compassion, and he was telling me a story about his daughter. She is in her mid-20s now and she is happily married. He said, "Now Aaron, when she was 11 years old," and this got my attention because I have an 11-year-old daughter. He said, "We were at a Compassion event where all the packets were out with the kids you could sponsor," very similar to what we did on Easter weekend.

He said, "My family already sponsored two or three kids, but my daughter came to me with a package and said, 'Daddy, I want to sponsor this little girl.'" And he was like, "Honey, we can't do that. We already sponsor kids as a family." And she said, "No, but this one is for me. I want to sponsor her."

He said, "Honey, you don't have a job and I know what will happen. After a couple of months it will fall on us to actually fulfill this commitment you are making." Then she just wouldn't have it. She was like, "I want to sponsor this little girl."

So finally he let her do it. And they filled out all the information. She stayed true to her word. She got babysitting jobs and jobs throughout high school at fast-food restaurants. And she sponsored this little girl all the way through high school and college.

He said, "Between the ages of 16 and 19 were for her some really challenging years. She started hanging out with the wrong crowd. She started dating a boy who wasn't a very good influence on her. She wore makeup and clothes we didn't approve of. Every one of our conversations ended in a screaming match, and that is if she would even talk to us."

“I’ve honestly got to tell you. There were days she would question her belief in God. She wouldn’t go with us to church. Her mother and I were really fearful. We just did not know what was going to happen. It was 50-50.”

She comes through all of that, goes to college, and meets a great Christian guy. They are engaged to be married and he and she, they go on this dinner date. She has a shoebox with her and she scoots it across the table to her father. She said, “Dad, I want you to pull out a few of those letters and I want you to read them.”

And he said, “Who are they from?” She said, “This is correspondence between me and my sponsored girl, all those years. These are a few of the letters she wrote me.” So he pulls out the letters and he begins to read. About three or four letters in, he realizes what was happening. During that phase of time between 16 and 19, when his daughter was a prodigal and she was off not talking to them, she was actually confiding through letters with this girl she was sponsoring in another country.

She was airing out all her questions about God. She was airing out all the things she was tempted to do with her boyfriend. She was talking about how her parents didn’t understand, how she was so upset with them.

He said, “I started reading these letters back from this girl and tears formed in my eyes because she was encouraging her to stay faithful to God, to make wise decisions, to continue to love and trust us as parents.” And he said, “It dawned on me that what was happening was that during those years when our daughter wasn’t talking to us, God was using a sponsored girl living in poverty on the other side of the world to disciple my little girl’s heart back to him.

That’s the kind of big God we serve. And that’s the kind of big God, regardless of your circumstances right now, who is in control. I know it’s hard and I know it’s painful, and I know maybe you feel like you are in way over your head.

Would you let God father you? A God who would send his only Son so that he might be reconciled with you? And would you just trust that he says, “Your job is not to make your kids’ decisions for them. Your job is not to control them. As a parent, it is to simply be the mediator in between, to be prayerful and intentional.” And he’s got it. He’s got it.

Father, we come to you right now. Thank you for the blessing of being a parent. Thank you for if our parents were a blessing to us. God, I specifically want to lift up those individuals who so desperately want to be parents, but it hasn’t happened for them yet. I pray your Spirit would comfort them right now.

God, I pray for the parents who maybe are estranged from their kids, or maybe somebody is here today and things are not going well with their parents. There is so much tension in this really powerful relationship. And God we’re going to have to fight for it.

We ask that you would do what only you can do, and we cannot. So God, maybe many of us are exhausted and at the end of ourselves. So we come to you with empty hands and we just say, "God, here is my messy situation. Could you take and do something with that? Could you work a miracle? Could you redeem it?"

God I pray that as men, women, and kids, we would make some courageous decisions today. Decisions that might cause some discomfort, decisions that would require extra energy when it would be far easier to fight the other person than fight for them.

Meet us in this place. Do a work that only you can do as we respond to you now. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.