

**Q: How should we handle the topic of transgenderism with our kids, beyond just explaining that God created us male and female?**

A:

- Mike: Helping kids understand just how deeply sin broke humanity and our world provides a framework for discussions about things such as transgenderism. In our home, these discussions often occurred when we were watching food competitions (since many contestants these days would identify in different ways). We would stop the show to talk briefly and I often would refer back to the fall (Genesis 3) and how our (humanity) minds were broken by sin. This brokenness and love for sin leads many to misunderstand reality, even including what they think about themselves (Romans 1:18-31) . This leads perfectly into the importance of renewing our mind (Rom 12) through the Word of God so that we know what is true and right and can build our lives around that and not our own view of ourselves. Finally, I always take time to express the importance of loving and praying for those who are deceived by the transgender mindset so that my children learn a heart of compassion towards them.
- Kent: I love the way Mike spoke to this.

**Q: How do we set healthy boundaries (without legalism) with family/friends in same sex relationships? How do we handle those couples being around our kids?**

A:

- Mike: In a recent article by Matt Chandler [writes](#), “we love the outsider because we were the outsider.” I mention that because I think that has to be the starting point for each of us and our families. That is not to say that boundaries don’t exist, but that our primary intent should first be to invite in the outsider, especially if our child can see us do it in a Christ-like manner. From there, open communication with your children is key (as age permits), but don’t be surprised by awkward comments or questions. Much of it may actually depend on your relationship and/or the personality of your friend/family member. If they are wanting to cause an issue or push an agenda then there should be clear, bold boundaries for protecting your family against false teaching.
- Kent: I do not think that boundaries equate to legalism. Boundaries are setting the standards and guidelines by which your family is going to function. Legalism is thinking that living by some sort of standard makes you have greater standing with God. Depending on the age of your child will dictate how you handle same sex couples that are family or friends. If they are old enough to recognize that is a different couple than mommy and daddy, then it will require talking with them and getting into some conversations that will be challenging, but can be used as teaching opportunities. Certainly, we teach and train our children to love everyone, but sooner than later there will have to be conversations that clearly define what God’s Word says about marriage and family structure.

**Q: What are some practical ways that we as parents can “aim at our children’s hearts” (as Kent said) and not just their behavior? Can you give examples of how you did that**

**with your kids? Or, an example of a time you shaped their behavior and in hindsight wished you would have shaped their heart instead?**

A:

- Mike: While I cannot recall a specific moment, I can describe the approach I found to be more “heart focused.” Keep in mind that I fell short of this sequence many times, but God has been gracious in the midst of my frailty.
  - *Discern the intent* - is this childishness or willful disobedience? Both need instruction but only need a disciplinary measure.
  - *Get down on their level* - make eye contact at their level as a means of mercy and in some cases may lead your child to respond in repentance (I had that happen a time or two...which is a sweet moment).
  - *Ask questions* - Do you know what you did wrong? Why is what you did wrong? Why did you do it? This helps them articulate the rule and can also help them understand that battle between what they know is right and what they want to do.
  - *Point to God* - Pointing to God as a parents guide for parenting and discipline helps a child understand the context for discipline and that it is not just mom and dad making things up on the fly (though it feels that way at times).
  - *Punish...or not* - In our house we only spanked a handful of times simply because our kids responded better to other pressure points (taking away things, etc). This is always the hardest part but it is important to understand that it is important that it is done with calmness and care...not in anger. Also, there were times we chose to show grace and not punish (after going through this series of steps), even when it was well deserved, because we thought the gospel imagery would be far more profound than the punishment itself. I remember one time we did this David was literally dumbfounded and almost in tears with thanksgiving. It was a sweet moment that gave us a great opportunity to talk about Jesus and his grace towards us.
- Kent: The easy answer is ‘make sure all of your discipline is because of defiance, disobedience, or selfishness and not out of childish/foolish behavior as they grow up’. For example, I asked Jason to use two hands while drinking a cup of milk one day when he was young. I saw him try to drink it with one hand and it was not going to work, so I stopped him and said to him, “Jason, use two hands when drinking from that cup so you don’t spill it.” A minute or two later, he tried to drink with one hand and spilled the milk all over the place. I was annoyed that he spilled, but he got spanked for disobeying, not spilling. I told him to go to his room, then I cleaned up the milk, went upstairs and sat on his bed and talked with him. I asked him if he knew what he did to get into trouble and I made sure that he knew he was going to get punished NOT because he spilled milk, but because he disobeyed. Focusing on the biblical principle they violated is the way to their heart instead of responding in anger to the circumstance that results from the violation of that principle.

**Q: How do you raise kids that are technologically savvy but not consumed with entertainment (video games, social media, streaming videos, etc.)?**

A:

- Mike: There is a reality that kids growing up in recent generations have a natural intuition for new tech, much like I had no problem using my analog tv or corded phone as I got older, so I don't necessarily see an issue with them not being tech savvy unless they have zero exposure to it. The second part of the question is the most important and does take some thought. Like many things, kids take their cues on technology from their parents. Therefore, I would start with the question, "am I modeling a balanced use of technology?" That has been a hard one for me personally (because I love tech), but it does make a big difference. Secondly, it's ok to set boundaries and to say "no". For our family, our kids were allowed a certain amount of screen time per day (varied depending on age) and once it was done it was done. This taught them to self regulate and not to depend on a screen to entertain themselves all day. The hard part for us as parents is using a screen as a means to escape the demands of parenting. Rather than escape we can use the screen as a tool for teaching and even discipline. Finally, fight the modern movement towards individual entertainment around the house. Instead, watch things together as a family. That shared experience is a golden opportunity for bonding and conversation.
  - On a practical note, as they get older it may be helpful to invest in technology to help limit access to things, such as [Circle](#) which we have used for years or [MM Guardian](#) if they are old enough to have a phone (works best with Android).
- Kent: I defer to Mike's answer.

**Q: How did you reconcile the hard topics when speaking to / leading your children?**

A:

- Mike: If I were to break this one down into three statements it would be: Be honest. Be humble. Be biblical. There have been times in some topics where I have to tell my kids that I don't know the answer but can try and find it. There are also some theological realities that we cannot completely reconcile in our limited minds. That said, we should make sure to always point back to the scriptures as our guiding light and foundation. When it comes to hard cultural topics, it is vital to ask "what do the scriptures say" because communicating "this is what I think" without distinguishing the difference can often conflate the two without clear communication.
- Kent: I love Mike's three points in his answer. I would add maybe one more to it and say Be Teachable. One of the greatest things that I think we can do from parents is to be very quick to listen to our kids and their understanding and view point on things. They may be totally wrong, but be teachable in learning what your kids think about things or in the pressures they face or in what the culture is screaming at them. Be teachable in those areas so that you can better help your children/teens work through tough issues.

**Q: Who did you go to (when parenting young kids) for counsel in times of weakness?**

A:

- Mike: My parents were an incredible help when my kids were young.
- Kent: We had some very specific couples that were about 10-12 years older than us that we really appreciated their heart for the Lord and for how they were parenting. I recommend that every young couple pick a couple or two older than them that they respect and get to know them and pick their brains as to how best do things within the family.

**Q: What are the “easy” parts of parenting? What were the most enjoyable and celebratory moments in your family?**

A:

- Mike: When they're in the womb. 😊 But seriously, in the moment it is hard to say that any of it was easy but I would definitely say that there was much to enjoy and celebrate. My wife, Amy, worked the weekends at the hospital for many years which meant I was home, solo with the kids every Saturday & Sunday. This “dad time” was a very memorable time as my kids were younger. As they got older I have found that I reflect and rejoice often in the battles that they have faced and overcome, especially when those battles have drawn them closer to Christ. We faced several of those when we moved to Virginia 7 years ago. Through many conversations, tears, and prayers we have seen the Lord work in mighty ways. Therefore, I would be careful not to discount those hard moments as bad. They are difficult for sure, but there are many you may look back on with fondness because of what God did in that moment.
- Kent: I am not sure that I would define any of it as ‘easy’. I mean it is easy to play with your child, or enjoy an ice cream cone with them, or little things like that. But, even wonderful things like watching them in a play or musical or watching them play sports is challenging. It’s ‘easy’ to literally watch them do those things, but challenging in helping them learn disappointment in loses or helping them with anxiety in performances or things like that. In every aspect of parenting, you can find joy and satisfaction, but ‘easy’ isn’t really in the equation. Nothing worth doing well is easy. So in parenting, being intentional in how you train, how you respond, how you deal with something always requires effort, prayer, and thoughtfulness. The most enjoyable and celebratory moments within our family have been the hundreds or thousands of small interactions, hugs, shared meals, shared experiences through travel, ministering together, and seeing how all the small things have added up to being blessed beyond what I deserve as a dad!

**Q: How do you know if an approach to discipline is working or not? Beyond being consistent, at what point is it okay to stop one method of corrective discipline to try another?**

A:

- Mike: Obviously, the most clear answer that it is working is that there is a change in behavior or attitude. Sometimes it may just be that you notice a hesitation before your

child takes that step into willful disobedience. That may show that you are on the right track. If there is no real response over time then it is perfectly fine to try something new. A quick note, spanking is neither forbidden nor the only means of discipline allowed by scriptures. Some children do not respond to it. My brother was one of them, and in one infamous moment he looked at my father after a session with the spanking spoon and told him “that didn’t hurt.” I think it was at that moment that my parents realized that there had to be a different way, and hiding the nintendo was one of the big ones.

- Kent: I appreciate what Mike said in his response and would add just one thought. I would try multiple forms of discipline at the same time. One might work better than another over a period of time, but spanking one time and then removing something another time and then making them sit still(or be in their room) another time could possibly help by keeping them guessing. If kids think they know the consequences ahead of time, then they will calculate whether or not the action is worth it. But, if you mix things up, then they never know exactly what they are risking by behaving badly.

**Q: As kids get older, how can we encourage personal devotion/quiet time without “enforcing” it? (Speaking to behavior vs. heart)**

A:

- Mike: First, model it as parents. Talk about what you learned in your devotions and ask the kids what they learned in theirs. That positive pressure can help stir their hearts. At the same time, just as parents place expectations on their kids for the betterment of their life and growth (veggies, exercise, reading, etc) it is ok to place an expectation of devotions each day. They may fly through it one day, but on another day the Lord may grip their heart with His truth. Be careful of making it a legalistic thing, but we often tell our kids that they need to have their homework done, beds made, and devos done before they turn on screens after school. (Honesty moment) We don’t always follow through with checking this, but it is something we strive for because guidance and helpful habits are import for kids. Plus, now that my adult daughter has a family of her own she is walking out some of those things that she learned but never practiced at home.
- Kent: No easy answer to this question. But, if I had to boil it down to one thing: Model it with the rules you set and demonstrate. If you never show it is a priority, then it won’t be. But, by even ‘forcing’ it before other things can be done, then you are demonstrating that you value it above those other things even if they are not there yet. Remember they will ‘mirror your model long before they mimic your message’.
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**Q: How do you remain calm during the chaotic moments in “the little years?”**

A:

- Mike: Laughter, partnership and prayer. I put them in that order because that is often how they happened. Little hands and demanding voices fill the house for hours on end with no end in sight and then that one last thing happens that can lead to either a burst of anger, uncontrolled weeping, or fits of laughter. While we had to deal with the other

two at times, most of the time my wife and I would look at one another and just start laughing. For instance, one time we walk into David's room and he has been wiping snot and boogers all over his walls for hours (after not going to sleep of course). I just closed the door, went back to our bedroom and reported to Amy about our new Picasso. From there we laughed until we cried. Yes we cleaned up the mess, but after that emotional release we did so with level heads and a smile on our face. That same kind of shared laughter connected to the needed partnership, whether a spouse a friend or a parent. Calling on someone to step in to help talk you down, physically give you a break, or just pray is crucial.

- Kent: I love that Mike focused on partnership. How do you remain calm during those chaotic times? You both must be totally invested. It's not moms alone to deal with and it's not dads alone to deal with. Rely on each other, help each other, sacrifice for each other, and rescue the other sometimes!

**Q: How do you deal with a child who frequently lies?**

A:

- Mike: In general, you would deal with it as you would any willful disobedience but if it is a consistent issue then there would be a weightier consequence. In our house when there was a loss of trust (which is what lying leads to) there was a loss of freedom, because a child could not be trusted with that freedom. This meant lost time with friends, limited family outings (yes, one family member can disrupt family harmony...a key lesson to learn as well), etc. For the older kid, you could have them do a word study on lying in the scriptures (which is eye opening). For the younger kid, constantly reminding them that lying hurts the family and makes God sad helps add seriousness to their sin.
- Kent: I love what Mike has said in his response. I would also encourage far steeper consequences for lying than for other things. (For example, if they disobey and then lie about it. I would tell them the punishment for the disobedience and even make it a pretty light punishment, but since they lied about it, I would tell them that now the consequence is much greater.) If the child is struggling with lying, then that issue has got to be intentionally attacked. As a parent of a child that is lying, I would encourage you to never let it slide. To be incredibly diligent to address and punish everytime a lie is told. This will affect your ability as a family to do things, to allow things, to let them go places, and punishments of children always affect you as mom and dad, but it is worth the sacrifice to try and squelch that very dangerous habit that the child has gotten into.

**Q: How am I able to teach my children God's word when I don't know his word fully by memory myself?**

A:

- Mike: You walk after Christ as best you can, learning as you go, and invite your child along for the journey. There is something special in a shared journey of faith and understanding.

- Kent: Teach and put into practice all that you do know. Keep striving to learn more everyday. Then, be quick to say, 'I don't know' and then go to God's Word and learn or seek help(online tools, commentary, websites) and find the answers. Recommend Gotanswers.org as a great resource for theological and Biblical questions.

**Q: Looking back on raising your children, do you wish you would have given more grace or been more strict?**

A:

- Mike: I would have to say "both" and not as a way to bypass the questions but because I don't think my issue was of too much of one or the other but often of misapplying one or the other in a specific circumstance. There were times I would be much too strict about things that were personal pet peeves or just because I didn't want to have to deal with something. Other times I would be too gracious and not address issues that truly needed to be addressed due to passivity. While I may ultimately lean more into the grace camp, I know I have misappropriated both throughout my parenting years. I am grateful for a God who is not only able to forgive my shortcomings, but can also redeem these moments in the lives of my children.
- Kent: Personally, I should have been more strict. I was the 'grace' parent and my wife was more 'strict/consistent' one. I think I was mostly consistent, but I believe looking back that I could have taken some pressure off of her if I would have been more strict right away. Again, this is a tough question to answer on the whole because if I say..."be more strict", then what if you are already out of balance toward that way? SO, balance again in key. If I had one recommendation about being strict or grace, it would be this: set a strict tone early in discipline. Much easier to move from strict to a little more grace as they get older and behave well, instead of moving from too much grace to strict. Because by that time, their behavior is probably not good and the foundation of discipline is shaky.

**Q: In your experience, have you seen any connection between the number of children in a family and how troubled a home is / how the children turned out?**

A:

- Mike: I personally have not seen a connection as it relates to the number of kids in a home.
- Kent: I do not believe there is any connection between how big a family is and how troubled a home is at all. Maybe how busy a home is!! I have seen several single child homes that are very troubled and some large families that are peaceable and all walking with the Lord.

**Q: How do you balance freedom vs. sheltering in a teen's life?**

A:

- Mike: Know your kids. You have to start from that place because there is no “one size fits all” answer to that question. Look at their past experience with limited levels of freedom (whether it’s school, friends, technology). One of the primary ways to gauge maturity is how they interact with authority (especially you as parents). Is it honest and respectful or disrespectful and manipulative? Secondly, allow the home to be a safe place to fail. Maybe there is limited freedom within the walls of the house, that is respected and followed, will lead to greater responsibilities. Finally, Pray and release. There will come a time you will give greater freedom and they will abuse it. My oldest got a phone and was not allowed to download social media, but after a couple weeks she downloaded Instagram and tried to hide it from us. This led to some hard conversations and a restriction of freedom BUT maturity did come by means of that mistake. Now, she is a positive voice in our younger daughter’s ear telling her to listen to our instructions because they proved to be of great value in the end.
- Kent: Prayerfully! Each teen is different in how they can handle different situations and responsibilities. Much of the freedom you should be giving your teen is based on their level of responsibility, not just an age or grade level. If your teen is defiant, then they have little to no freedoms. That’s not sheltering them, that’s equating freedoms with responsibility and if they don’t grasp that concept, then they should get very little freedoms. As far as sheltering from ‘bad things’, that must be done prayerfully! Obviously wisdom must come into play as to what you will allow your children to be exposed to. But, if you shelter too much they are not prepared to deal with anything and if you have no restrictions they are not prepared to deal with anything as well. There is a balance that you must strive to find where you engage with your child and the culture and walk them through it.

**Q: What factors went into deciding how many kids you had? Is not wanting a big family or a lot of kids selfish?**

A:

- Mike: For us it wasn’t anything profound. We both loved the idea of having 3 kids and now are pumped about having a granddaughter.
- Kent: It’s a very personal decision. It can be selfish, but only that individual knows the motives behind the decision. For Tara and I, we needed In Vitro Fertilization in order to have children. We are blessed with two and that is all we could have. But, we also know each other and how we are wired and I am not sure we would have opted for more. This is such a personal decision between spouses and the Lord and you should not feel shamed whether you want a large family or small family.

**Q: What are some practical ways to submit to my husband?**

A:

- Mike: While I hate to break the 4th wall with this response, after trying to think of a thoughtful answer I continue to read Kent's response and say to myself, "he said it better". Therefore, I will simply say "ditto" to what Pastor Kent says below.
- Kent: Well, this is going to look very different with every couple. First let me say, that a proper understanding of Eph. 5:22-33 is key to this question. Both for husband and wife to understand the roles covered within that Scripture. If either the husband or wife have a false view of biblical submission, then it will be very challenging within the marriage to demonstrate that properly.

But I think some practical ways that you can respect and submit to your husband are the following: try to encourage as much as possible, be careful in how you speak of him to friends and especially family, be cautious in your attitude toward him in your responses, pick and choose when to make a big deal about things (if something isn't exactly how you hoped or thought would be best, but it's just different, be willing at times to let it go), be gracious in your communication especially when you disagree, do not hold things over his head when he has made a wrong decision that you guys disagreed on ("I told you so" is a very damaging phrase within a marriage), and pray for him daily to lead well, love you and the family well, and walk with the Lord daily. Nothing helps a wife in this area of respect and submission more than a loving husband. Pray for him to be that.