

Stupid Rain

WHAT IS THE MOST POWERFUL HUMAN INFLUENCE IN YOUR CHILD'S LIFE?

Your “quality time” with your child?

Church and Sunday School?

Friends?

Parental discipline?

These may all be good things, but there is another influence more powerful than all of them. The most powerful personal influence in your child's life is **everyday talk**.

Everyday talk is talk that happens in the unplanned moments. It happens in casual, unguarded moments. It happens when you are distracted or irritated and would rather not be talking at all. It happens

when you receive unexpected news, good or bad. You are always talking or thinking about things—at home or on the way to the mall, when you are driving to work or school, when you are falling asleep (or lying awake), or when you are dragging yourself out of bed in the morning. This is everyday talk.

The Power of Everyday Talk

Talk is a given. Everyone talks. It's a basic function of life. In order to teach your kids you must talk to them. But there are all sorts of talk. For example, formal discussion (usually a monolog, in reality) occurs when you sit your children down and explain some matter that you think is really important. Then there is talk that gives directions, such as, "Take out the garbage," or "Be quiet," or "Come here." However, Deuteronomy 6 speaks about a specific type of talk that God wants you to have with your children—everyday talk.

Why do I say everyday talk is so powerful? Because the Bible teaches so.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (NIV).

The New Living Translation freely translates the same passage this way, "And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these com-

mands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again” (NLT).

The kind of talk that God requires here is talk that happens in the normal routine of life, every day. God wants you to talk about His world. God wants you to talk about what He does and how people respond to Him. He wants you to do this when you are at home, when you are out and about, when you relax. He wants you to talk about Him with love and awe every day. He wants you to talk freely and naturally to your children about His commands and how to obey them day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. This is what Deuteronomy 6:7 means. God wants your everyday talk to be about Him.

Does this idea seem strange or unnatural? Are you thinking, “What good will this do?” God’s ways are not our ways. Remember the historical setting of Deuteronomy. Moses was giving his final instructions to Israel before they were to enter into Canaan. Moses could not go with them. After leading them for forty years, he had to say goodbye and leave them to enter the Promised Land without him. He was giving Israel the tools and weapons they would need to overcome the Canaanites.

What weapon would enable them to conquer a land filled with ferocious warriors? It wasn’t what you might expect. He told them to talk

to their kids about God everyday. In Deuteronomy 6:12, Moses told the Israelites not to forget about God when they entered the land. The way for the Israelites not to forget was *to talk to their children about God all the time*—when they got up or when they went to sleep, wherever they were. Talking about God and what He was doing for His people was to be a vital weapon against their enemies. It was the key to their success.

The weapon of everyday talk

Everyday talk is still key to successful parenting. But everyday talk is not automatically an effective weapon. At least two things have to happen. First, God says that *these commands of His are to be in your heart*, living there in a rich, full way. Think about that for a moment. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Moses says that these commands of God are to be so valuable to you that your heart cannot contain them. His commands are to dominate your thinking and overflow from your heart into the lives of your kids as you walk along life's road.

What kinds of thoughts live long enough in your heart to take up residence there? Or, said in a slightly different way, what things are so important to you that you can't stop thinking about them? Dads, how many times do you replay that six-iron that gave you a winning birdie? What about when your team won the big game in the last seconds? Is there a new car or new DVD player that is constantly on your mind?

Are you consumed by getting your new fall wardrobe? Or, negatively, is your heart dominated by thoughts of how others have wrongly treated you? Are your thoughts dominated by how unfair life is? You get the point—what topics are alive inside your heart? What do your friends, family and coworkers hear about, whether they want to or not?

God wants his commands in that place of special privilege. Do you love God? Are you blown away by His Word? Is the awesomeness of God something that your mind keeps turning to? Does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for your sin dominate the thoughts of your heart? This is the picture of Deuteronomy 6 when it says, “These commands are to be upon your hearts.” What thoughts live in your heart? You know and God knows. Your children know.

Second, impress them on your children. God wants you to repeat His Words over and over. Wherever you are with your children they should hear about the constant interaction you are having with God and His Word. This is how God’s word will make an impression on your children.

Lasting impressions cannot be made only by prayers at mealtime that thank God for food and missionaries and then nothing else is said about God until the next meal. Now, let me explain. This does not mean that you must quote the Bible all day, or spout systematic theology in every conversation. It does mean that as you grasp a profound truth

of God's Word you will find ways to explain it to your children. Your knowledge and wisdom will become part of their lives, too.

For example, suppose you are reading in the Gospels and you come to passages where Jesus shows His power over the winds and the waves (Matthew 8:26–27). As you think about this you realize that God is so powerful that He controls the weather. All weather, everywhere. So when you see a cloud in the sky or experience a sudden, unexpected thunderstorm (even if it messes up your golf game), or read about a hurricane, you are amazed that Jesus is, indeed, Lord over the weather. You are blown away (pun intended) by the truth of Scripture. Talking about the weather isn't just small talk. Weather events are opportunities to talk to your children about God in the way that Deuteronomy 6 envisions. This insight isn't obscure or hard to understand—it's everyday talk!

God wants you to look at the world His way. You can learn to be thankful for a rainout. You can even learn to be intrigued at what God is doing. How many other events did He change by that thunderstorm? You are observing God at work! God wants you to use the ordinary events of life to teach your children to know and trust God and His Son.

Here is a practical example of this point.

Let's say you planned a special day. You scheduled this day weeks ahead. Today is the day. You were going to finish a landscaping project

in the morning and then meet the guys for a round of golf at the country club. You had arranged to take the day off to get it all done. The forecast was for clear skies. But the growing puddles of rainwater spreading across the ground say the forecast was wrong. Your mood matches the dark clouds. You turn away from the window and mutter a comment about the stupid (or worse) rain.

“What, Daddy?”

Why couldn't it rain tomorrow?

“Daddy?”

“Uh, what did you say, son?”

“What's stupid?”

“Oh, nothing. Why don't you go clean your room? Daddy's busy now.”

These unguarded words from your mouth present a powerful view of God to your children. Your seemingly casual words forcefully instruct your children about God—for good or for bad. How would Satan want you to talk to your kids about something as basic as the weather? Your big golf date (or boating day, or baseball game, or garden show, etc.) gets rained out. You find yourself angry and upset. You say something like, “Why couldn't it have waited until tomorrow? I've been weeks setting this up. Stupid rain! I can't believe what bad luck this is!”

These comments communicate to your kids just how well you think

Jesus Christ, the Lord of the wind and the waves, is running His world. You are complaining against His decision to bring rain when you didn't want Him to. Whom are you pleasing? Whom do you think is cheering you on, saying, "Go for it, keep it up, couldn't have said it better myself, atta boy!" (Hint: it's not the Holy Spirit.)

Think about it. Do you really want to present God's actions in His world with Satan's spin? You only have so many words, so many minutes to show God's truth to your kids. God wants you to make them all count. Your children can hear Satan's spin from the world all the time. They need to hear God's truth spoken with love and awe by parents who are following God's direction in Deuteronomy 6.

The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators documents that teenagers spend only thirty-five minutes a week talking with their fathers.¹ That's five minutes each day. What do your children hear from you about God in the few minutes that you have each day to speak to them?

This concept, of course, applies to other areas of life than just the weather. The principle of Deuteronomy 6 is that your everyday comments are the ones that teach your children most profoundly about your view of God. Your interaction with God in everyday, ordinary, non-church life is the most powerful tool of influence that you have with your children. It communicates what you *really* believe. You are being either a good example of someone wholeheartedly committed to God or

a bad example, depending upon how you react to everyday life. Do you see how important everyday talk is?

To make a good impression, everyday talk must be spoken with a pleasant spirit, so that children will regard your direction the same way they would a gift of fine jewelry.

You might ask, “Where did this thought come from?” Listen to Proverbs 1:8–9:

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction
And do not forsake your mother’s teaching.
They will be a garland to grace your head
And a chain to adorn your neck.” (NIV)

Your instruction of God’s Word should be given as joyfully and carefully as if you were presenting your kids the finest jewelry to wear. Your teaching, if heeded, will make them attractive, just as fine jewelry would. Don’t just throw God’s Word at them. Present it with love and care.

If you bought your daughter a gold necklace for her birthday, how would you give it to her? Would you ball it up and toss it to her on her way out the door? Of course not! Would you not rather place the necklace in a jewelry box, wrap it beautifully, pick a special moment, and then give it to her? If you just balled up the necklace and threw it at her, she would probably think the necklace was on the bargain table at the dollar store. Too often, we hurl admonitions at our kids in the heat of

battle, propelled by frustration and anger. Proverbs 1 encourages you to present God's truth as the precious gift that it is. How you present it is likely to have a great influence on how children receive it. The loving presentation of God's truth is a way that you can impress God's commands on your children.

The Gospels provide the most profound illustrations of how to obey the command of Deuteronomy 6 with the power of everyday talk. Consider the example of Jesus Christ, whose everyday talk was exactly what God the Father wanted it to be—perfectly righteous and holy. In living a perfect life, He showed how to use everyday talk

Jesus used everyday talk as his primary method of teaching. In his training of the disciples, Jesus did what God instructed the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy 6. He lived Deuteronomy 6:1.² As a result, Jesus' disciples were different from other religious leaders. Mark 3:14 says that Jesus selected his disciples so that they might be with Him. He intentionally chose a method of teaching that involved around-the-clock discipling. They were with Him 24/7. Acts 4:13 says that it was *obvious* that the disciples had been with Jesus. There is a clear cause and effect here. He lived with them, traveled with them, ate with them, worked with them, and talked with them. In the end, they were like Him. Not perfectly, of course, but *obviously*.

How did that happen? We have the account in the Gospels. Jesus

talked with His disciples about God. He used every event (and non-event) to talk to them. He used a fig tree, a sparrow, a kernel of wheat, foxes, wine, camels, gates, highways, pearls, mustard seeds, the hair on your head, money, the weather and all sorts of other things to talk to His disciples about God. This is the kind of talk Deuteronomy describes. Jesus used everyday talk to train the apostles. In the same way, God wants you to talk to your children about Him all the time. No matter what comes up during your hectic day, He wants you to talk about Him—every day.

Does this kind of talk seem unnatural to you? We lead busy lives, and all too often lose sight of priorities. We don't take time to meditate. Talking about God isn't hard or complicated, but it does require some time and preparation. If you don't spend time *thinking* about God, you won't have much to *say* about God.

God is everywhere, all the time. He controls everything. If you are aware of His power and presence, if you take even a little time to meditate on Him, your everyday talk will begin to be about God.

Everyday talk happens; the question is, what kind do your kids get most? Following the principles just described will help you to increase your conversation time with your kids. Your teenage children need more than thirty-five minutes a week. Practicing everyday talk about God will help give you the extra time they need.

But what about the other influences on your children? You aren't the only one talking to them. Deuteronomy 6 also teaches you that children, as well as adults, are designed to be influenced by others. Jesus was with His disciples so that He could influence them. Someone will always be influencing your kids. Someone will always be using the powerful tool of everyday talk to encourage your kids either away from God or toward God. The Apostle Paul knew this well when he warned the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (I Corinthians 15:33) NASU.

You see, if you aren't talking to your kids, someone else is. The statistics indicate that teenagers are spending three hours a day watching TV. Preschoolers are watching as much as four hours per day. If teenagers are listening to three hours of TV everyday and averaging five minutes a day talking with their dads, who is winning the influence battle? If your preschooler watches four hours per day, how many hours are they hearing from you about how God runs His world? It doesn't take X-rated violence, sex and language to have an ungodly influence. Even the "good" programs for children can be "bad company" if they offer an exciting, satisfying world that ignores (or denies) the sovereign God of the Bible. Do you really want your children to get the impression that it's okay to ignore God most of the time?

Paul teaches that bad company, which brings the wrong sort of ev-

eryday talk, will attack and weaken good teaching and moral character. Notice two more translations of this text:

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” NIV

“Don’t be misled, ‘Bad companions corrupt good habits.’” CCNT

All these translations give insight into the original Greek. Bad influence (that is, bad company or companions) will act to corrupt or ruin good habits of moral character. *The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* says that this corruption is active.³ In other words, bad companions will actively attack good moral character and even overcome it if not countered. Wrong everyday talk is corrosive. It will keep on corrupting until it is stopped, cleaned up and replaced. This is something you must be concerned about. What sort of everyday talk do your children hear?

TV, videos, movies, conversations with others, listening to music—these are all sources of everyday talk. They are all influences that impact your kids along life’s road. If you spend five minutes saying what is right and the influences from bad company total three hours or more, what do you think is going to have the biggest impact on your children? Your good words as a parent can be drowned out by the sheer volume of corrupting bad influences. If you don’t agree, go back and read the verse again: **“Bad companions corrupt good habits.”**

Everyday talk is important. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking

that some influences are neutral—neither good nor bad. Anything that doesn't influence your child **for God** is an influence **away from God**. Jesus taught that whoever was not with Him was against Him.

How to measure your children's everyday talk

Here is one way for you to analyze the forces influencing your child's life. Write down how your child spends his day. List how many hours he goes to school, watches TV, videos, movies, computer games, plays with friends, listens to music, sits by himself, rides the bus, etc. Evaluate whether each of the above is influencing him for good or bad. Remember that no influence is neutral. Add up the hours of good influence, and add up the hours of bad influence. Compare these totals. Add in how much time you spend influencing him for good. This will give you a picture of how much your child is being corrupted with bad company. Parent, what type of everyday talk is your child hearing most?

Do you need to begin reclaiming the influence your child receives? This is why Paul says so bluntly, "Don't be misled, [don't be fooled] bad company corrupts good character."

Now you know why everyday talk is important. You know how powerful everyday talk is. You can, in the long run, provoke your children to anger by not providing the everyday talk that God describes in Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6. And you realize now that this everyday talk should be given as the most precious of gifts, because it is! Ev-

eryday talk will influence your kids either for Satan and his ways or for God and His ways. As you read this book, pray that God will use it so effectively that the everyday talk your children hear will lead them to Christ. Pray that your responses, even to something as mundane as unexpected rain, will lead to the praise of God.

Application Questions

1. What do you think your everyday talk reveals about your priorities and your worldview?
2. Make a list of twenty-five ordinary events or things that you could use for everyday talk about God.
3. When do you have everyday talk with your children?
4. What opportunities do you have to increase or improve your everyday talk?

Footnotes

¹ William J. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994) 102-103

² Jesus' "everyday talk" was not unplanned or unthinking, of course, as ours often is.

³ Fritz Reinecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1980), p. 443.