

## Training Boys by Michael Pearl

I am often asked how to raise boys. It has been so long since my boys were 12 and 14 that I had forgotten much of what we did, but because we have the Russian boys back with us this summer, relating to them again has refreshed my memory considerably.

The first time around, when training up my own children, I didn't reflect much on what I was doing or why (training was more intuitive). But, after having spent the last ten years answering parents' letters, writing articles about child training, and analyzing everyone else's methods, it has caused me to take special note of the way I relate to these young guys. It is interesting to observe myself interacting with them. It is like going back in time and viewing myself being a daddy once again—like getting a second chance. I think it has given me a fresh perspective on the basics—concepts that I can now relate to you in fresh ways and which may prove helpful.

I didn't do everything right the first time around. The grace of God and an exceptionally good wife made up for many of my inadequacies. Thanks be to God, our children all turned out to be a great blessing to us and all who know them. They are emotionally stable, happy, creative, godly, with excellent marriages and good kids of their own.

### SECOND TIME AROUND

The most fundamental thing I see taking place in my relationship to the Russian boys is something I often see missing in many father/son relationships. It is a difficult concept to convey, like trying to define water for a fish. Only now, late in life, do I clearly see it. There is no single word to define it, but I will call it **Passion**. Maybe the word Intensity would also be appropriate. The word Commitment misses the mark somewhat because it implies a conscious act, a stirring of the will. This spontaneous passion...intensity...zeal toward my sons (*my daughters received this as well*) began so early and was so uninterrupted that, until the presence of these two Russian boys brought it to mind, I never knew I had it.

As I think back to when my sons were first born, I can vividly remember its beginning. When I held my first newborn son, I knew that my life's mission and purpose had been inextricably altered. Everything, absolutely everything, took second place to my new role as father. **My son became top priority in my thinking and my schedule, above my ministry as a pastor, above my vocation as an artist and cabinet maker, and far above my leisure time and my convenience.** The context and perspective of my life changed as much as it did the day I got married. My frame of reference changed. From that moment on I would never be off duty. *I now had the highest calling on earth—that of Father.* And the first time my little boy said "Daddy," I knew I had chosen correctly. It was when my son handed me his firstborn child, that the circle was complete.

**I never viewed my boys as a burden.** They were always an exciting opportunity, the core of my reason for existing. But now, Deb and I have people come up to us, telling us how wonderful we are for "sacrificing" and keeping the Russian boys for the summer months. The first two or three times it happened, I just stood and looked at

them in puzzlement, trying to understand what on earth they could be talking about. "Sacrificing? Are we on the same wavelength here? Where is the sacrifice? Surely there is no reward in Heaven for having a good time!" Then it dawned on me: They actually thought we were being noble and "dying to self." Bless their hearts for the pity, but I count these boys as one of my indulgences, my deep pleasures and diversions. Some people go to the movies; I take the boys into the garden to work or down to the store for some ice-cream, or to the river to fish or go boating. I talk with them about going through puberty, and discuss how to make and save money, what to look for in a prospective wife, and how to show themselves honest and loyal in all transactions. Just this week I told 14-year-old Kolya that when he becomes president of Russia, or head of the Navy, that he must invite Deb and me over to Moscow and give us the VIP treatment. He said he would. I told my wife later that I had better treat him well or he may send me to a collective farm to weed the potatoes.

I am ever aware that I am molding them to become adults, and that it is my privilege to participate in determining the quality of a living soul. All our actions in the raising of our kids will reverberate in the halls of eternity. How could that ever be a sacrifice? It is an appointed, *even a mandated position of trust and honor; a position that promises glory* if performed faithfully and successfully.

In the months I spend with these boys from another culture, it calls to my memory the thrill of raising my own sons. It is the excitement of being engaged in a wonderful project and, although you are enjoying every minute of the process, you can hardly wait to get it finished for the pleasure that you know it will bring. One day very soon, these young fellows will be men. They will remember me and the time we spent together with better clarity than I will be able to recall. I am very aware that I am either contributing to the *fine-tuning of their consciences or to the hypocrisy and deceit of a life that uses people and lacks temperance.* In every situation that comes up, my own conscience is checked by the knowledge that I am leaving my fingerprints on their souls—spiritual, forensic evidence that God will examine and that it will all come back around one day. Before I know it, they will be men, standing over me...remembering...judging...and passing on what I have handed them. Wow! There is nothing boring in this calling!

I am convinced that this Passion—this Spontaneous Commitment—is the most basic answer to every child training need. Where this intense preoccupation with your children is missing, you will not be effective in bringing them to emotional stability and godliness. I have seen so many parents trying to redeem their children and their family-life by adding some principle or practice to their schedule, when the thing that is really missing is the passion, the zeal, the love and wonder of their high calling.

I think we can all agree that raising children is the greatest challenge and, potentially, the greatest blessing on earth. But, now let's discuss how this fundamental attitude of Spontaneous Passion plays out in common experiences.

### FULL-TIME JOB

The boys must be so important to you that nothing ever displaces them from your thoughts or plans for even a moment. That doesn't mean that I cannot plan to have time to myself—to take off for a few

hours but never at the expense of their welfare. I can never simply dismiss the children from my thinking. When the Russian boys are here, my time is not my own, and I wouldn't have it any other way. It is not a "principle" that I must make myself remember and practice; it is a gut feeling, a compelling and unavoidable responsibility. Just as when you are driving a car, you might take your eyes off the road for a moment, but only under circumstances that permit you to do so and still provide full control of the car. If children are in your care, your heart must always be on them, for their souls are in your hands as surely as if they were riding on the hood of your car. *"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame"* (Proverbs 29:15).

I can place the boys in the care of one of my daughters or sons for the day, and I can almost forget about them, knowing they are loved and protected as surely as if they were with me. Part of my responsibility for them includes knowing that a variety of social life will do them good. They might get bored with Big Papa after a while, and I certainly can't keep up with their pace every day; but all my plans always center around their growth and maturity. I cannot take a moment off until I have satisfactorily seen to their care.

Today, I dropped one of the boys off at Papa Glen's to cut the grass. He loves to drive the tractor, and he gets \$3.00 per hour...plus snacks and a good lunch. I was able to forget about him until it started raining, and it occurred to me that he would now be inside, and they always have the TV going. Older folks sometimes use the boob tube for company and don't even know what is playing. But a 12-year-old is very impressionable. I hastened over there as fast as I could get out of the house. I could not continue with my schedule until I had secured the safety of the young man in my charge.

The 14-year-old was with my son all day, cutting his grass and trimming with the weed-eater. I know that Gabriel is sensitive to the needs of a young man, so I could relax, trusting him to bring Kolya home in better shape than when he left. The boys are my constant charge. The responsibility consumes me. This is the foundation of raising boys.

## CAMARADERIE

Their presence here with us now reminds me that when my boys were young, I felt it was important to maintain camaraderie with them, not to allow someone else to occupy the place of prominence in their hearts. The boys may go to work with my son Gabriel, or my son-in-law, Justin, or they may spend some time jumping on the trampoline with other boys, but I remain the central figure in their life. *It takes much of my time, energy, and imagination to stay ahead of them, but, as with my own boys, I live with a sense that the world is a maze of pitfalls, and that they must keep me in sight if they are going to make it through safely.*

Just the other day, when my daughter came home without the boys, I asked her where they were. She told me that they wanted to stay at the home of some fine people here in the church who have boys their age. When she told me that there were also several additional church kids there and that they were all just "hanging out," I rushed over and brought the boys home. It was not because I had heard bad reports on the other kids, quite the contrary; they all have fine reputations. It was just that sense I had that they were without their shepherd outside the

fold, in a place where their hearts could be stolen away. I don't want them to get accustomed to the lazy, "chill out", "cooling it", mentality of the average church youth of today.

Two hours of that and they could lose their momentum, become dissatisfied with the more disciplined atmosphere that I had been providing. I do not want someone stealing away their affection. I am jealous, not for my sake, but for theirs. They need the stability and wisdom that adults provide.

I don't want to leave the impression that I isolate the boys from their peers. They have a social life, but only when the direction is clearly defined. They go camping with other kids their age, but only with my grown sons and daughters or some other Father whom I trust implicitly. They go fishing with other boys and jump on the trampoline, but when the momentum is gone, I send the other boys home.

## ACCESS

The boys need uninterrupted access to me. When I am in my office working, sometimes one of them will come, open the door, and just look at me...waiting...offering a half smile...waiting for some signal, some affirmation of our relationship. It is enough to smile and say, "I must finish this office work; why don't you guys find something to do until I get through." They just want to know that I am in control, that their day...their life...is ordered and secure, and I will be theirs in a very short while.

Most teenagers rebel against their parents, and when you ask them why, the usual answer is, "They don't listen to me...they don't care." Parents are shocked, "When have I not listened? Anytime you had anything important to say, I listened. I never turned away from any serious discussion." Kids don't just come up and start talking about what is really on their minds (wives and husbands don't either). They are always a little uncertain and want to feel you out first. They begin talking about irrelevancies to see if you're even in a "mood" to listen. If you are, then they may get closer to the subject that is really on their minds. If you are still listening and do not interrupt them with a lecture or a cliché of "great wisdom," they may begin talking about their problem in the third person, as if it were just idle conversation about someone else. If you are still with them—as a real friend would be—they may finally open up and get to their issue. You are accessible. You listened. You cared.

But if you mostly ignore your children, turn them over to computer games, audio and visual media, telephone pals, and social events, they may continue to live in the same house, but you won't find them on the same page. Jesus rightly called himself "the door" of the sheepfold through which the sheep could safely pass to green pastures AND return again safely to the fold. **Fathers must be open doors to their sons for their very life's sake!**

## IDLENESS

That old bit of wisdom, *"Idleness is the Devil's workshop"* may not be Bible, but it is surely the wisdom of time well said. I simply do not allow idleness to incubate mischief. If I see that the boys are bored, I either do something with them or guide them into some wholesome, creative activity that will keep their souls growing and developing. I never allow them to stay in their rooms unless they are using it as a workshop. Kolya will stay in his room on long evenings or rainy days

putting model cars together. I know what he is thinking about when he is reading directions and lovingly stroking the plastic parts. It is a most wholesome exercise of the mind and body. Bedroom doors are without locks, and doors are left open except to change clothes—three minutes!

**Boredom can be a killer**, if not quickly detected and then properly directed. It breeds either creativity or discontentment and unthankfulness. When I see them bored, it alarms me, because their minds are adrift and looking for somewhere to land. Where will their imaginations take them? What form of stimulation will they turn to? The Devil and the world are ready at the first hint of “need,” ready, that is, to tickle the flesh to death. A bored child is without direction or purpose. He is drifting around looking for someplace to focus his soul—a very dangerous condition if left unattended. I try to provide many different opportunities to engage their imaginations and energies, so I don’t have to keep up with them, but if we run out of “fun,” I create something—bicycle riding, skate boarding, building something out of wood or metal, fishing, playing sports, musical instruments, auto mechanics, lawnmower repair, home repair, cleaning house, washing dishes, grass cutting, hunting, wrestling, horizontal bar, lifting weights, exploring the woods and creeks, boating and swimming, reading, hobbies—anything but watching TV, playing computer games, listening to music, snacking, and “hanging out” with other kids.

## **MEDIA INFLUENCE**

I do not allow them to play computer games, and if I did have TV capabilities, I would not allow them to watch it unless it was a pre-selected learning experience, something I deemed of value for their education, but with no commercials! I do occasionally put on a DVD of Roy Rogers or Gene Autry and watch it with them. Most John Wayne movies are unacceptable. I have other selected videos that I may allow them to watch, one or two times a week, but everything is chosen to encourage righteousness and truth, or because of its character-building lessons.

Some people would call me “legalistic.” Not so, for my convictions don’t come from rules imposed upon me by my religious circle or through something I read. I am not trying to hold to some standard. Like all truly born-again Christians, the Spirit of God directs me to walk in truth.

I have observed the fruit of the potato chip/computer chip generation—kids raised indoors on media and computers. They are a sickly, weak, and effeminate herd, milling around in their imaginations, drifting in and out of reality, afraid of the real world and unable to cope with its challenges. Parents should be ashamed of themselves for allowing their children to “hang out” with a computer. And any parent who would allow his children to have one minute of unobserved access to the web is stupid beyond belief.

Yes, I think you should teach your children to use a computer. If they seek employment in any big city, their salary will likely be tied to their ability to operate complex programs. But a computer is a poor friend, a worse parent, and a soulless spouse, as many women who have husbands and sons immersed in one can testify. Media and megabits never make a man; they make shadows. If you want your sons to have substance, save them from being consumed by the glowing screen.

## **WORK AND MONEY**

Many times we have written about teaching children to work. I notice that the boys love to work if it involves fellowship with adults. They hate to work if they must work alone, especially if it is a repetitive, boring job. I am the same way. Certainly life will demand that we do boring jobs, but when you are teaching children to work—to love to work—you do not want their first (early) impressions of work to be extremely unpleasant. All work is pain and must be endured for the end that it provides.

Remuneration is a great end. I pay the boys for jobs like stacking the year’s firewood, or weed-eating the office grounds. They don’t get paid for doing the dishes or weeding the garden, since that is part of our daily needs. You must be careful to pay them a little less than they are worth. You do not want to give them a false sense of their value. You will need to raise their salary as they get older and can do more per hour. I sometimes pay them by the job—they work harder that way, but I usually pay them by the hour. The 12-year-old gets \$3.00 per hour, and the 14-year-old gets \$4.00 per hour.

When the work is especially hard, like shoveling manure or stacking firewood, I give them a bonus if they do a good job quickly. They always have it in mind that they may get a bonus. If they work two and one half hours, I may pay them for three. I always strive to appear generous in the way I pay them. It is important to pay them immediately after work (Deut. 24:14-15).

Glory is another good inducement. If you brag on their work, they will work themselves into the ground to get that kind of praise. A job that others will see, like painting the garage, will put energy into their work. Fixing a lawn mower or repairing a broken door handle can elicit praise and admiration. Any praise you give them should always be earned and related with their work attitude. If they try their best and the job is poorly done, accept it as perfect. God’s grace has extended to me in measureless ways over the years!

Artistic expression will push a man (or boy) to endure his hard work—like building a straight, white fence that he and others will enjoy viewing. Trimming a hedge, raking up leaves, and arranging the flower beds can drive one to enjoy his work. Painting your own room some exotic color that provokes admiration tends to make one forget that he is working. Some kids love to clean up old places—attics, garages, barns, etc. Others despise the job. Try to give each of them jobs that are suited to their likes.

**Your real goal is to raise a boy who has a will to work, who assumes it is his responsibility to provide for others, to do the dirty work, because he is THE MAN.**

You want to stretch them, to challenge them, but not to break them beneath a load they cannot yet carry. That will come soon enough. Let’s put it this way. A 3-year-old can work for maybe one minute at a time putting leaves in a basket. After that, it becomes misery. A 6-year-old can work for ten to twenty minutes doing the dishes or cleaning up the yard. A 10-year-old might be able to work alone for about one hour, but he can work with you nearly all day as long as he has several diversions and breaks along the way and can quit early enough to enjoy the promise of a swim or a special treat, plus, a little money as reward. A 13-year-old can go to work with his dad or someone else

and keep at it all day—two or three days in a week, but he should not be made to work five days a week, eight hours a day. A 16-year-old can work like any man and should be so engaged. The ages and hours will obviously differ from one kid to another and from one environment to another. I am not trying to lay down rules that you must follow. I just want you to be aware of the principles that are so critical, and then you can adapt them to your circumstances.

We don't have the space or the energy to cover every imaginable subject, so I will simply list some of them. You can develop the thoughts yourself. I am sure that there are other points you can add to the list. Send me your suggestions:

- I teach them and train them. . .
- To enquire and investigate
- To be skeptical of all experts, from religion to medicine
- To have empathy and seek justice
- To forgive the repentant and fallen
- To maintain their honor in truth
- To choose a good name over riches
- To honor women and protect them
- To nurture and protect all children
- To see the humor in all of life
- To be thankful to God and others
- To tell others about Jesus
- To know their Bible better than any preacher
- To make money without being a slave to it
- To work hard, and then play hard-in that order
- To be tough and able, ready to defend themselves or others against violence
- To not denigrate or ridicule any man
- To stand on the Word of God, even unto death.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT ME?

Now my reader may be asking, "What about those of us who recognize that we do not have this "passion" of which you speak; can it be achieved by an act of the will?" You cannot simply will to be passionate, but you can consciously make choices that will change your heart until you come to be consumed with an intensity of thought and feeling. Just as a man's passion for his wife (I don't mean sex) can be supplanted by excessive attention to work, to the computer, to pornography, to sports, to hobbies, or all of life's responsibilities put together, so can a father's passion be distracted from his high-calling as a father if he makes choices that will freeze out his intensity for his children. **It is true that the person makes the choices, but the choices also make the person.** You will give attention to that which you love, but it is also an axiom that, you will come to love and feel passionate about that to which you give your full attention.

To put it plainly: If you had a proper upbringing and your heart is in the right place, you will be passionate about your children without anybody telling you to do so. But the reality is that most of us had parents like ourselves. When you add to the equation the fact that we are all inclined to selfishness and lust, our children suffer from our deficiencies. However, although you may have come to the unsatisfactory place where you now find yourself, in part, through unfortunate circumstances, and in part, due to your own bad choices, your future need not be enslaved to your past! But it will if you remain indifferent, and in your present state of inertia! You can change your

heart by changing your actions. You can change your priorities by prioritizing your schedule. "*Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established*" (*Proverbs 16:3*). Do what you ought and, in His time, you will find that God will have your heart where it ought to be.

I cannot close without addressing a question that I know we will receive in the mail. We will have two hundred and thirty-seven women write something like the following:

Dear Mike,

I read your article on raising boys, and I know it is the truth. I can see where my husband has failed. I have tried to get him to take more interest in the boys, but he just retreats into his own interests. What can a woman do when she doesn't get any support?

If a wife takes what I have written and tries to put pressure on her husband to implement the things I have suggested, or if she becomes critical of him for not doing them, it would be better if she had never read this article. The absolute worst response you could have is to let the kids know that you are dissatisfied with them and their father.

It is a fact that most of the wives who read this are going to see their husband's shortcomings. If my wife were to have read it when my boys were growing up, she could have found cause to "exhort" me. I did not do everything right all the time. Thank God it is the long haul that determines the outcome, not the exceptions.

I do have a practical suggestion. First, try to get your husband to read this article without finding fault or accusing him of his shortcomings. Simply ask him what YOU can do to improve the rearing of your boys. Then drop it. Do not pursue your husband beyond his reading of the article.

Second, assume that the responsibility is entirely yours. Take steps to provide what you can, and leave the rest in God's hands. Maintain a cheerful attitude, and try to provide for all their needs. Do not become overly burdened trying to change things that are out of your control. **God has a way of making up for our inadequacies when we obey to our limit and then trust Him for the rest.** When you have done all that you can humanly do, lay it down and dance. God will tap you on the shoulder and join you to make this monumental effort of training your boys a *joy and a delight!*

-*Michael Pearl* [www.nogreaterjoy.com](http://www.nogreaterjoy.com)