



Who's the Boss?

- Geri -

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.

Proverbs 1:8-9

I will never forget the intense feelings of insecurity and self-doubt that I felt as a new mother. They caught me by surprise. I was the oldest of four children, had been a babysitter throughout my teen years and had served as a preschool teacher for four years. I thought I knew what to expect and how to do this job—piece of cake! Oh, how different it is when you are raising your own child.

As much as our firstborn, Elizabeth, was my delight and my heart, she challenged my authority and my confidence as no one ever had. She was smart and determined, and long before she could verbally express herself, she sensed (and capitalized on) my insecurities and my self-doubt. As Sam often says, "Elizabeth decided to fight for the position of 'head woman' in our house." I found myself debating and arguing with her like I was another two-year-old—and all too often I was on the losing side!

About this time, someone mercifully gave me a copy of James Dobson's books *Dare to Discipline* and *The Strong-Willed Child*. I am forever grateful for these volumes and

their author. As I read, I learned that God's plan is for *parents* to be in charge, not the children. I came to see that Sam and I were the first authority that our children would follow and, as they learned to obey and respect us, they would one day learn to obey and respect not only other legitimate authorities such as teachers, coaches and employers, but ultimately God himself.

No, I still didn't always know exactly what to do in every situation, but I did become convinced that God had put Sam and me in charge, and I began to grow in my confidence.

It is amazing how self-confidence changes your behavior. Instead of reacting emotionally, you can calmly be the mother God intended, and take charge. You don't have to engage in arguing and debating or resort to emotional tirades. You said it and you expect it—and that is enough for you and your child to know. You can be confident because you know that God himself has put you in charge. It doesn't mean that everything suddenly becomes easy and your children magically obey every time, but knowing that your authority as a parent is God-given can give you the confidence to calmly follow through on your expectations and to “win”!

You need to be confident, but your confidence is not based on your perfect performance. As a parent you will make mistakes—plenty of them. Sometimes you may be too hard and expect too much, or lose patience. At other times, you won't be strong enough. But none of those mistakes means that you stop being your child's mother! However great you feel your weaknesses are, you still know more than a three-year-old! You are the parent that God has put into your children's life to love and to guide them.

Our children actually *need* us to be confident. When we lack confidence, it fills them with insecurity. They rely on us

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to feed them, clothe them, love them and protect them. When Elizabeth was still quite young, I left her at home one afternoon with Sam. At that time (thirty years ago!), Sam did not change a lot of diapers, and I rarely used disposable diapers. But hoping to make things easier for him, I left him with disposables. Sam recalls spreading out a blanket on our shag carpet (yes, shag!) and getting ready to change Elizabeth. As she lay there, Sam and a friend tried to figure out how to put on the diaper. Which way did the diaper go? How did the tabs work?

After quite a few minutes, Elizabeth's mouth began to quiver, her eyes filled with tears. If they couldn't figure it out, what was she, a helpless, ten-month-old baby, supposed to do? They had about a decade of college education between them, but they obviously didn't know what they were doing, and it shook her little world. She needed them to at least act like they knew how to put on a diaper! Children may fight us (I've seen many little ones exert their first "power plays" right there on the changing table), but they depend on us for their care and for their sense of security.

One of the most beautiful things about children is their willingness to forgive. Maybe God gives them an extra capacity for forgiveness because we parents need it so much. I am thankful for the many times my children quickly forgave my shortcomings and mistakes. Have you messed up? Have you lost your temper, been too harsh or insensitive? Being confident does not mean we have the right to be prideful or harsh. In fact, true confidence means the humility to admit mistakes, ask for forgiveness and then continue to lead.

There will be many times when you don't know exactly what to do. One scripture that has comforted me tremendously over the years is this one: "If any of you lacks wisdom,

he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Ask God for wisdom, pray for his guidance, and expect him to answer! Nothing has driven me to my knees more than my desperate need for God's help in raising my children.

Sometimes I believe answers literally came to me as I was praying. At other times the answer came through the counsel of someone else or was made clear as the situation unfolded. Especially should you seek wisdom from your husband, the one other person in this world who loves your children as deeply as you do. Also, get advice from other mothers—both those who have already raised their children and young women who are in the midst of these years themselves.

Remember, God's plan is for you to raise your children. As inadequate as you may feel, *you* are the mother and *they* are the children...and *God himself* has entrusted you with this job. You already know much more than you realize, and you certainly know more than they do!

Walk and talk with confidence, not because you are a perfect mother, but because God is a perfect heavenly Father, and with his help, you will succeed. These are "the Tender Years,"—precious, poignant and wonderful. Enjoy your children and learn as you go!

BUILDING BLOCKS

- Take out two pictures; one of you and one of your child. Look at them and ask yourself:
 - Which person should be in charge around here?
 - Who knows more about life?

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- And most importantly, who has God put in charge?

If you need to, tape the pictures up as a reminder of “who’s the boss.”

- Colossians 3:20

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.