

**The High Leverage Family**  
***Authority Figure***  
**May 11, 2014**

**PRELUDE – Praise Adonai**

**Worship Songs – Great God Who Saves / Be Unto Your Name**

**Parent / Child Blessing**

**Mother's Day Recognition**

If you're somebody's momma, would you please stand?

Let me say for everyone here "thanks for being mom and for the role you play all through life. We truly wouldn't be here without you!"

Our band has a little song to share in tribute to our moms. And while they do, we'll be receiving our offering. Guests don't feel obligation to contribute (though we appreciate if you do). Members and regular attenders, remember this is our way of investing in what God is doing through all of us collectively as NHCC. And we appreciate your contributions to the cause.

Here we go ...

**Feature - Mr. Mom / Offering**

That was nice ... and in keeping with Mother's Day and also the Parent/Child Blessing ... we're continuing this morning in our "High Leverage Family" series. We've been taking a look at some powerful principles that can dramatically impact our marriage and parenting for the better. If this is your first Sunday with us (or you haven't been here for a while), you can hear, read or watch those messages in the media section of our website, [www.northheartland.org](http://www.northheartland.org).

Today, I'm excited to get to share with you one of the simplest but most profound principles of parenting wisdom that I know of. And when I say "wisdom" that's exactly what I mean. This is not an absolute "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" handed down from on high; instead, it's a way of thinking and acting that makes a whole lot of sense based on the way the world works, based on the way kids work and based on the task given to parents (which, as we discovered last Sunday, *is* handed down from on high).

**Benevolent Dictators**

I won't go back into that this morning (other than to again say the message is online if you're interested in knowing more) but one of the questions that comes out of that is how, as a parent, you exercise your authority over your children – especially if your goal is to raise godly children.

And, by the way, contrary to what you may have heard or read, as a parent you *do* have authority and you *do* have a responsibility to use it for the good of your kids.

Well, what is authority? Very simply, authority is the right to define limits, rules, and consequences. It's the right to demand and expect obedience to those limits and rules and to enforce those consequences.

And, according to the Bible, in the family, that right belongs to the parents. God never tells kids to obey their grandparents or aunts or uncles or big brother or big sister. He never tells kids to honor their teachers or their soccer coaches.

**Instead, He says:**

*Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you. Honor your father and mother. This is the first of God's Ten Commandments that ends with a promise.*  
*Ephesians 6:1-2 (TLB)*

If you're a parent, you *are* the God-appointed authority in the life of your children. In a very real sense, you have been proclaimed by God to be a "benevolent dictator" over them. Have you ever thought of yourself that way as a parent? You're the benevolent dictator.

Now, a lot of people react to that idea in one of two extremes: they either shy away from accepting that role (because the very idea of telling anyone what they must do or must not do is dead-set against our cultural love-affair with "tolerance"), or they overdo it and become heavy-handed and domineering. And both of those extremes come with very negative consequences not only for the child but also the parents. If parents are too hands-off or too demanding, they're going to be totally frustrated and their kids are not going to get what they need from them.

And that's where this little piece of parenting wisdom comes in; that high-leverage principle. Get this one thing right in your approach to parenting and you will dramatically increase the probability of actually seeing your authority work to develop the kind of children God (and you) want, plus you'll have a strategy that actually allows you to maintain your sanity in parenting – at least to a point, because, all of us go a little bit crazy as parents!

But, before I can explain this, I need to explain something about the nature of authority. When most people hear the word authority, they tend to think in terms of someone taking charge and being in control. But in reality, authority can be expressed not only as control; it can also be expressed as *influence*.

Let me explain the difference.

*Control-oriented authority* says, "You must do what I say simply because I have the authority to tell you what to do. And if you don't do as I say, I have the right and the power to bring about a set of consequences that you will find unpleasant." People obey this kind of authority because they want to avoid those consequences; they want to avoid getting in trouble.

*Influence-oriented authority* says, “Let me suggest a course of action to you, because I have more life experience and wisdom than you do. If you don’t do as I say, most likely, not I, but *life* will bring about a set of consequences that you will find unpleasant.” People listen to this kind of authority because they trust the credibility of the one who gives it and they want to avoid messing up their lives.

Now, with that understanding, we also need to understand that *parental authority* is to include both of those.

**I think it’s fascinating how the Apostle Paul once described this:**

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath: but instead bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (NKJV)*

In the Greek text, the word translated for *nurture* carries with it the idea of generalized training in life skills, while the word for *admonition* implies correction and discipline. So, Paul is saying “parents (fathers in particular) make sure your kids get a healthy combination of both. Make sure your kids receive admonishment – ‘do this or else’ (which is control) and also, nurture – ‘here’s how life works and what you need to know’ (which is influence).”

By the way, note that Paul also says that when authority is expressed in this way, you will avoid “provoking your children to wrath” – unnecessarily frustrating them or making them angry at you.

The question is ... when do you use one or the other? When should you try to control your children and when should you try to influence them?

“Well, that’s a silly question, Rick. You should always try to be a good influence on your kids! And you should always have some level of control, right?”

And that’s right to some extent. But I’m talking about a strategic application of authority. When is it best – or wisest – to choose one or the other ... which brings me to the high-leverage principle I want to share with you this morning. And I should say that this is not original with me. It’s from a book called “Shepherding Your Child’s Heart” by Ted Tripp which we read when our oldest daughter, Marilyn, was a sophomore in high school and we were stumped at how to best deal with a pattern of behavior we were seeing in her. When we read this book it actually changed the way we handled the situation (and also how we were dealing with Katie and Janelle).

And I’ll say more about that in a bit but first let me share the principle. Here it is:

**Young children must experience parental authority primarily as *loving control*. Older children must experience it primarily as the *influence of wisdom*.**

Younger children need loving control. Older children need influence of wisdom.

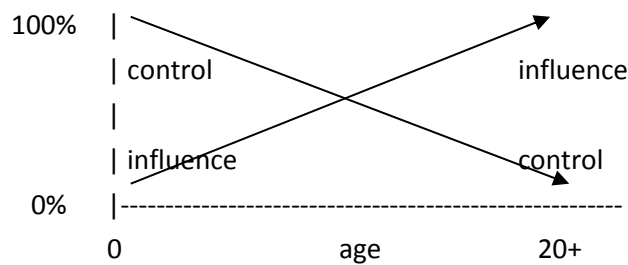
Ok, that’s the general principle; now, let’s break it down.

When your kids are young, primarily what they need from you as an authority is to be “the boss of them.” That doesn’t

mean you don't love them. It doesn't mean you don't play with them and enjoy them. It doesn't mean you don't try to talk to them in ways that influence them or fill them with wisdom. You do all that stuff, but you *never forget* that in those early years, what children need most is direction and discipline – and quite often, *immediate discipline*.

But when your kids are older, they need something different. They need for you to be primarily an influential counselor. That doesn't mean that you don't sometimes draw the line or enforce some kind of punishment in response to something that they do. You do those things, but you never forget that what they need most at that stage of life is someone whose wisdom they trust *because you have proven yourself wise in the years when you expressed your authority through loving control*.

**Now, there's a helpful little graph that shows how this works.**



The idea here is that you change your strategy over time. Control decreases while influence increases over time. So as your kids get older you should be *decreasing* the amount of *control* that you attempt to have over their lives and increasing the amount of conversation and influence that you have with them.

And actually, to be clear, this *is* the reality of the situation whether you play it that way or not. The truth is, you cannot really influence a toddler. You can't sit down with a three-year old and talk about the big issues of life (or any issues of life for that matter). And, on the flip side, it's nearly impossible for you to control a teenager once they get a driver's license and a cell phone. You can try, but they and their friends are too connected and too mobile and you really lose control at that point whether you want to admit it or not.

And this is why this is such a wise parenting strategy and a high-leverage principle: *it synchronizes both what a child needs and what a parent can actually do*.

Unfortunately, to the detriment of their kids, a lot of parents do the exact opposite. They're afraid to discipline their young children because they just want to be loving and they want to be friends (they have self-esteem issues and they're trying to get stuff from their kids, that fulfillment and satisfaction that they should be getting elsewhere). So, they don't ever want to make the kid mad because "that's my little buddy."

And then when those kids get older and have no self-discipline as teenagers, they try to power up on them when, in reality, that's when they should be giving more and more freedom and dialoging with those kids about their successes and failures with that freedom.

And what happens then? *We provoke our big kids to wrath* – just as it says *not* to do in the scripture we just read. It provokes them because big kids feel insulted by controlling parents, in the same way that most adults feel insulted by other controlling adults. Think about that. If you're an adult and someone tries to control you – either bosses you around or manipulates you – how do you feel? It makes you angry. The same thing happens when a parent tries to control a 16-year old. That's just how it works.

So, this is the principle. And, again, this isn't a Divine absolute on the order of the 10 Commandments. Instead it's wisdom based on the way the world works, based on the way kids work and based on the task given by God to parents to be benevolent dictators.

Now, what I want to do in the rest of our time is to get very practical about this and talk a little bit about how this works in everyday life at various stages of a child's life but, obviously, there's a whole lot more that could be said that I have time to say. So, I will refer you again to Tripp's book, "Shepherding a Child's Heart" as well as several other resources we recently made available on our website through the RightNow Media section. Just go to the website and click on the media tab and then on "RightNow Media" and it will take you to the NHCC "channel" (which works just like Netflix).

When you get there, you'll see that we've loaded up some excellent video teaching there about parenting in general that will also be helpful in this matter as well.

## **In Control**

OK, here are four things that are crucial when your child is younger and you need to express your authority through loving control.

### **1. Lay out clear rules and boundaries.**

For example ... "Don't touch the stove." "Bedtime is at 8:30. We're going to set a buzzer and when it goes off, it's bedtime." "Do your homework as soon as you get home from school today." "Don't take your sister's things without asking." "This is your bed. This is mommy and daddy's bed. We sleep in them separately."

By the way, if you can't say it, they can't obey it. Never assume that a child automatically knows what is expected. If you discipline a kid who doesn't know or understand the rules, then you've made a mistake as a parent and you need to go to that child, even if he's a three year old, and say, "mommy (or daddy) messed up on this. We were not clear and I'm sorry for disciplining you about that."

### **2. Explain the reason for your rules, even when kids are young.**

For example, "Don't touch the stove. It's dangerous and could hurt you. Bedtime is at 8:30 because you get cranky if you don't get enough sleep. You sleep in your bed and mommy and daddy sleep in their bed because, well, everyone will be much, much happier in the long run if we keep it that way. You'll understand later."

Explain it, but don't expect agreement or even understanding. Remember, little kids aren't primarily motivated by wisdom. Be willing to talk about these things - but do not argue about your rules and expectations. When all is said and

done, one thing should be clear: The parents make the decisions not the children.

One more thing about this explaining things (I need to throw this in because sometimes I've fallen into this and other people I know do this, too): "because I said so" isn't a valid reason. Not only is that a misuse of your authority, powering up just because you can, it's also laziness. You are missing a great opportunity to prepare your child for the day when you will become the primary voice of wisdom in his or her life. When you start early, explaining "here's why we do these things; here's why we think this way," you build credibility and wisdom for later.

### **3. Spell out the positive and negative consequences.**

Things like ... "If you clean your room you can go outside to play (positive consequence). If you're mean to Johnny again, he's going to have to go home and you'll play by yourself (negative consequence). If you sass your mother again, you'll have to go get the paddle."

The key is to "make the punishment fit the crime" as the saying goes. Don't go overboard, because it doesn't take severe consequences to get the job done with kids under 10 years old.

Of course, that raises the issue of spanking. Wouldn't that be considered a severe consequence? Isn't that going overboard?

Yes and no. Let's just be real clear about this.

#### **If it's done in anger, yes, it's overboard because the Bible says ...**

*Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*  
(NIV)

*James 1:20*

It doesn't produce godliness which, again, is our goal as parents if we're also Christians.

If you get angry and spank your kids just because they make you mad, or you beat them even, then you're just a bully who can get away with it because you're bigger and stronger. That's not "authority expressed as loving control." That's out of bounds.

On the other hand, the Bible does say an occasional swat on the rear end can work wonders.

*Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod [paddle], he will not die.*  
*Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.*      *Proverbs 23:13-14 (NIV)*

I like what author and pastor Tony Evans says about these verses. "The kid who is being spanked *thinks* he or she is dying," he writes. "The neighbors may think he or she is dying. But the reality is that, if you are applying loving biblical discipline, you are actually spanking *life* into your child, rather than death."<sup>1</sup>

When our kids were young, I can't tell you how many nights Jetta and I would look at each other and say "do you feel like all we did today was spank children?" And the answer was "yep, because all they did all day long was challenge and

push the limits.” So, this was the consequence, “go get the paddle.”

But over time, that respect began to build up and we began to control some of this behavior.

Now, don’t hear what I’m not saying. As a parent, you don’t *have to* spank your child. And it shouldn’t be your first or most common disciplinary action. But there are times when a spanking (not a beating) *is the most* appropriate and effective tool, especially when you have previously promised it as a negative consequence. If you promise it, you have to follow through ...

**4. ... which leads to the final principle: You have to follow through on your promises, especially the negative ones, which are the hardest.**

Young kids need to have their parents draw a line in the sand and say, “If you step over this, bad things will happen.” If you promise a consequence – good or bad – you’d better deliver or you will not be taken seriously in the future.

As I said, there’s a whole lot more that we could talk about on this but I just want to encourage you – especially if you are a younger parent with younger children. Do not, do not, do not be afraid to exercise control at this stage of your child’s life. I know it goes against everything you hear these days in our extremely permissive culture but the lack of discipline and maturity among many older teenagers, college students and young adults these days is directly tied to the fact that their parents were more interested in being their buddies instead of their bosses when the kids were young - it’s just true. And then, they turned around and powered up on these kids when they were teenagers and the kids just couldn’t take it. We’ve produced a whole generation of people like that. And if you don’t believe me, spend 15 minutes talking to a high-school teacher (I’m married to one and you won’t believe some of the stories) or talk to someone responsible for hiring new employees. It’s a mark of our culture. I’m going to get off that soapbox now but, don’t be afraid parents.

### **Under the Influence**

But let’s move on and talk about older kids and how this principle applies.

And I should tell you that this part of the strategy is even more challenging than the one we just talked about, but it’s the one I enjoyed most as a father with my three girls. In fact, I often say that when our kids were under the age of 10, I pretty much was an idiot as a parent and Jetta was a genius. But the older they got the smarter I seemed to become. (Not that Jetta became any less of a genius – don’t hear what I’m not saying!)

Anyway, remember that this principle says that in the second half of childhood, kids must primarily experience the influence of wisdom. They increasingly need the kind of authority in their life who says, “Because I have more life experience than you do, I have some things to share with you that will help you avoid disaster, help you be successful, help you become a good contributing citizen of this world and maybe even attain the goal of godliness if you so desire.”

**King Solomon, who wrote most of the book of Proverbs in order to influence *his* kids with wisdom, put it this way.**

*Listen, my child, to the instruction from your father, and do not forsake the teaching from your mother, for they will be like an elegant garland on your head, and like pendants around your neck.* Proverbs 1:8-9 (NET)

That's a very different kind of authority compared to loving control. So, what exactly does that look like in everyday life? When do you start transitioning from one form of authority to the other? Does it mean once your kids reach a certain age you never make demands or exercise control? Well, let's take them one at a time.

As for the transition, that's dependent on the personality and maturity level of the child. You just have to know your kids and ask the Lord for guidance on how you do this. Within the same family it will be different from one child to the next ... which is what we discovered with our kids.

When Marilyn was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, we realized that she was not developing the ability to make wise choices about her social life. It's not that she was doing anything bad or wrong. In fact, it was quite the opposite. She was a very straight and narrow, keep it between the lines kind of kid. The problem was that she was making us the "bad guy" instead of wrestling with the issues herself and developing the courage to saying no to her friends.

For example, she'd get invited to a party and have a hesitation about going because she had an idea of what might go on there and didn't want to be part of that. So she'd ask us for permission to go, but secretly hoping and hinting "please say no, so I don't have to deal with it and tell my friends and they'll think I'm a loser." But, we *didn't always say "no"* and she'd get mad at us and totally stressed over having to say "no" for herself and that was really hard for her.

And, we played that game almost every Friday and Saturday for many months until, one day, after prayer and what I believe was a specific "word from God" on the issue, we made a radical decision. *We totally removed every rule and every boundary from the child's life.* She was the only junior we knew of at Park Hill South High School who had no curfew - she could stay out all night – and no limits on where and with whom she could go, as long as we knew where she was and when she was coming home.

Now, that didn't mean we were silent on her social life. In fact, part of the deal was that she had the freedom to ask for advice, and we reserved the right to comment on – and even disagree with and challenge - any decision she made. But, bottom line, the decisions at that point were all hers.

And over the next two years, we had many conversations about her life, what's wise and what's not wise. It wasn't always easy or comfortable, but in the end the result was that *she developed some convictions of her own about the structure she needed.* She developed convictions about where and with whom it was wise and unwise to hang out and she developed a little bit of a backbone.

Now, I'm not saying that every kid should get that level of freedom as a sophomore or junior in high school, but think about this especially if you have older teenagers: when your kid goes off to college after high school what's going to happen? They're going to get complete and total freedom and it's going to happen *overnight*. One day they're living in your house and the next day they're living in the dorm – they're going to be in party city. That's what's going to go on there. They've never experienced "no rules" in their whole life and now they're away from the person who has had the most influence in their life. That seems backwards, right? So, why would you not want the opportunity to have influence



over them in that type of “non-structure” during at least part of their high school years?

The deal is, also, every kid is different and you make these calls on when and if you do these kinds of things based on the child’s personality and maturity level. Unfortunately, we did not know that or do that when our “life-of-the-party-who-needs-rules” daughter number two came along. When *Katie* hit the 11<sup>th</sup> grade two years after Marilyn, she just expected the same level of freedom that Marilyn had - “Hey, it’s time for that deal you gave my older sister. Sign me up for the ‘no rules,’ baby.” Literally, on her birthday, she was like, “let’s talk.” We didn’t feel good about it, but we wanted to be fair (which was our first mistake) and we said “yes” (which was our second).

It turned out to be very counterproductive. Katie wasn’t ready for that kind of freedom and we saw some negative things developing in her character and attitude. But the most significant problem was that she did not want any more influence from us. She never asked our advice and whenever we would give it, she became highly offended.

So, a year later, we revoked the original deal and she became the only *senior* we knew at Park Hill South High School who had a curfew *before* midnight and could go out only *one night on the weekend*. Can you imagine how pleasant *our household* was in her senior year? It was not fun.

And that actually answers the other question about whether you, as an *influencing parent*, in the influencing stage of this, should ever make demands or exercise control.

Yes, you should, but only after influence has failed. As kids get older, you *lead* with influence, that’s your main trick, but then you *fall back* to control. Not the other way around. The truth is, even then, the amount of control you truly have (because, again, your kids have to go to school, they have a car, they have a phone) it becomes more and more limited over time.

By the way, I should also say, when you attempt to take back control over an older kid, you have to be very specific about why you’re doing it and what your expectations are. When the crisis hit with Katie, I sat down and began writing up an analysis of what we had tried, what had gone wrong, the strengths and weakness we saw in her that we felt responsible to develop in the time we had left with her, what the new rules would be and what we hoped they would produce in her. It was kind of like a vision statement for her and our family – mostly peace in our family. Basically, I developed and presented to her a strategic plan for the rest of her high school years.

And she was highly offended by it - “Dad, this is what you would do for someone who works for you!” That’s right, because, sometimes you have to sit down with people and say, “here are the expectations. We’re clearly not on the same page.” She was offended but, the result was, it produced a great deal of clarity which was necessary in that emotionally charged situation because things had gotten to the point where there was a lot of emotion in every little thing. So, “let’s write it down so we can always go back to the paper - here’s what we’d said; here’s what we’ve seen.” And, years later, what was really cool was, after she had gotten out on her own she came back and said, “I just want you to know that I hated it when you did that, but it was the right thing to do. It was good for me and I’m so glad you had the guts to do it.” And, just to be clear, she is a wonderful child and everything is cool. I feel like I’m saying bad things about her. But, she was a challenge and she would admit that, as well.

Now, as for Janelle (our third), we spoiled her rotten and she never gave us any issues. That was the strategy. No, seriously, she seemed to be a balance of her two sisters and was able to handle the freedom much more easily than either of them. But we did spoil her, too!

Now, the story I've just told you illustrates three principles of influence-based authority.

**1. The first one is ... develop systems to minimize conflict.**

I wish I had an hour to talk about this because this is gold ...

When kids get older, you've got to avoid being put in the position of having to make a "parental decision" on every little thing. As an *influencing* authority, you don't want to be *arguing*, you want to be *coaching*. You don't want unnecessary emotion over nit-picky decisions to impede the transmission of wisdom. Systems help greatly in those things.

For example, that "total freedom" deal we had was actually a system: "let us know where you are; when you're coming home; and we retain the right to give you feedback." That helped to focus the tension in the right place – the decision-making ability of our kids – and not our fairness or unfairness as parents.

By the way, systems can help with more mundane issues, too. When our kids hit their teenage years and they needed money for lunch, money for the movies, money for clothes, money for presents, gas, etc, etc., again, it put us in the position of constantly having to say yes or no and how much.

So, what we did was to develop a system. We added up over a year how much money was going to those things, divided by twelve and that became their monthly allowance. And *they* became responsible for deciding how much money would be spent on gasoline and how much on new shoes instead of us.

The tension had been transferred to where it belonged – not with us, but with *their* decision-making ability.

That leads to the next principle, which is ...

**2. As much as possible, let reality provide the discipline.**

As a parent, one of the key strategies for transferring wisdom to older children is to arrange the circumstances of life so that they learn from reality. (Actually, you should start this very early with little kids).

When we entered that total freedom stage with Marilyn and Katie, we were trying to set them up to learn from reality. For example, if they stayed out too late, they paid the price on the back side when they were tired the next day and had to get up and go to school. If they spent too much time socializing, and didn't have enough time for less-exciting tasks as washing their clothes, then they had to go dirty. *We* certainly weren't doing their laundry. We stopped that when they were 10 years old. Big people wash their own clothes, don't they?

Now, at this point someone might ask, "well, Rick, you're making a huge assumption in all of this: that the kids even care about those things. But, what if they don't? What if they just don't care about making good grades, or having clean

rooms or clean clothes or other things that are far more important?”

That brings us to the third principle of influence-based authority.

### **3. Talk about matters of the heart.**

*Why* don't they care about having clean clothes? *Why* don't they care about their grades? Or, even, *why* do they care *too much*?

That was one of the issues with Janelle. *Why* did she freak out when she didn't understand her math homework? *What* did she think would happen if she makes a C? *Would* she die?

As an influencing authority in her life, it was my job to ask those questions and to lead her to deal with issues that went deeper than her ability to perform to a certain academic standard.

With Marilyn, the issue was *why* did she fear rejection for her convictions so much that she felt compelled to hide behind a “no” from her parents? *What* was the dynamic in her heart when she finally started making those decisions on her own? Those were questions we got to ask when we went to the “total freedom” policy.

That “analysis paper” I wrote when the policy failed with Katie gave me the opportunity to call the question of *why* she was rejecting structure and influence. It gave us the opportunity to suggest that her messy room might really represent a messy heart and not *just* her style and personality.

By the way, she didn't immediately jump for joy over that idea, but it put the focus on the most important issue – her heart.

### **Conclusion**

And in the end, that's what this is all about.

At some point our kids are going to grow up and leave us. And the greatest influence we will have had on them is what we did for their heart. Did we shepherd them in a wise way – such as loving control when they were younger that transitioned to a wise influence when they were older – did we shepherd them in a way that trained them, disciplined them and drew them not only towards us and our wisdom and love but also to their Father in Heaven and his wisdom and his love?

Let's pray together.

<Prayer>

**Feature – When You Come Back Down**

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

1. Next week we'll conclude this series. The title of next week's message is "when it all goes wrong." When you try all these things we've talked about or you don't try all these things we've talked about and it goes wrong. What do you do when your family blows up (your marriage or your kids)?

If you know a friend or a family member who needs to hear that, feel free to invite them.

2. Also, as you leave this morning I want to remind you we are signing people up for classes in June. I'm amazed at the number of people signing up – it's excellent.

Thanks for being here. It's Mother's Day – go be nice to your mamma if you can.

Endnotes

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2. Tony Evans, *What A Way to Live!*, pg 249