

You Owe Me Bubba Ingram

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD...” (Psalm 128:3a).

Wherever you go in the next few days, look for children. Whether you're at the mall, grocery, church or certainly school, you will have occasion to see some of these shorter and cuter versions of yourself running around. What besides their height and “cuteness” would God like for us to know about them? I would like to give a few possible answers from the vantage point of my mom as I continue the series of lessons that Mom taught me about being a man.

I didn't ask to be here.

As parents, we all know we are the ones who begin the relationship with the children, not the other way around. I've spoken of my mom's selflessness before. I regret to say that I probably took a little too much advantage of it throughout my childhood! There was a good balance in our home, though. While mom was getting me another glass of juicy tea, dad would give the “your legs aren't broken” look to me. I must say the combination of their two personalities was perfectly suited to show the best of every personality trait to me. In this case it was selflessness and responsibility presented to me. It just took me a little longer to figure out the responsibility side. (Sorry Dad.)

There were some occasions, however, when I did feel a little pang of conscience over efforts Mom was putting forward on my behalf. Whether it was staying up with me when I had the “Ape” nightmare or delivering my 10 “closest” friends and me to Putt-Putt and then to the bowling alley, I do remember feeling my conscience. I don't remember the exact circumstance that led to me saying anything. But, I do recall on several occasions expressing that I was sorry she had to do so much for me. On those occasions she would say “Baby, you didn't ask to be in our life. We invited you to be in our life and we never regret the invitation.”

What a difference those words can make in a child's heart! Yes! They want me. No, it doesn't spoil a child to tell them they are important. If anything, it takes the pressure away of having to strive for recognition, position and attention in your family's eyes. We've all seen the movies where the big-screen shows a family so clearly neglecting the needs of a child and the impact such is making on the child. Sometimes it's more difficult to see the error when it's *our* needs being asked to take a back seat to the child asking for a drink, for someone to play a game with them, for someone to read to them or maybe just someone to look at and listen to them “just once.” The kind of mark a parent or loved one can make on a child at this crucial juncture is permanent and overwhelming. Either the child lives with the question of “Am I wanted?” or they grow up - having been reassured that they were important – and as such they can then seek to help others feel important.

How else am I supposed to learn?

When I was almost 9 years old, my life was changed in a big way. I believe this was when some of the “responsibility” side started to make sense to me. My mom and dad called me back to their room one day and asked how I felt about being a brother. I don’t remember what I said. I probably just said I was hungry or something like that. In several months I realized this was a real deal. Mom was changing sizes and shapes. Shortly after that she made the first overnight trip away from me when she entered the hospital. I remember having a lot of questions at this point. Was she going to come home? Would she be permanently disfigured?

Just a few days later Megan Leigh came into *my* world. But, I don’t recall ever feeling threatened. I had a pretty long run with Mom and Dad alone. It was a good time to bring some fresh air into the family. She was it (still is). Mom let me feed her, rock her, change her and of course I played with her. She just had to learn to like some things that were not traditionally girlish - like blocks and balls and puzzles. I really enjoyed her being around. It made me feel good to “take care” of someone else. As I got older, I started feeling a bit like I was being followed everywhere I went. Naturally, she had been around me since birth and was used to my idiosyncrasies. She was content to just go wherever I went and do whatever I was doing. As I got into my teenage years this became somewhat of a nuisance. It hurts me to say it now. It didn’t hurt so badly then. “Mom, tell Meg to leave me alone,” I’m sure I would say. Now I long for a minute with her, but both of our schedules are hectic and difficult to work around. Ironic, isn’t it?

Mom helped me to deal with the “little sister” factor throughout my teenage years by using a tactic I try to use with my boys today. She would take me to a quiet room and talk directly to me, showing me that my feelings were important. She would tell me the truth in a way that made it appealing to me instead of being repelled by it. I had started thinking of Meg as an intrusion on my privacy and a hamper to my blossoming “tough guy” image. Mom taught me that this “little heart” thought of me as the biggest and best thing in the world. She told me that my influence over Meg superseded even that of her own parents. She taught me that the things Meg saw in me and did with me would be a part of her life forever. Wow, now that changed things! No, I didn’t take her with me everywhere I went from then on, but, there were a lot of times she would go places with me and my buddies or even me and my dates.

It wasn’t a stretch to expand that lesson to anyone who might be looking for someone to emulate. I might unknowingly be “the one” to whom some younger boy or girl is looking for an example. There may even be some people my own age that would like an example of someone who at least tries to do right in life. This principle really has legs. **What if everyone, at least everyone in the church, acted like there were little eyes on them all of the time?** It might surprise us how important we are in another person’s life without even knowing it! What if everyone accepted that they are role models (except for the professional athletes, of course)? What if we really believed Jesus’ words in **Mark 9:42?** Who would we rather have teaching those we love? Our children are watching us. It’s our responsibility to make sure they are watching a pattern worthy of God’s gift of influence.

I'll be in charge one day.

One day, today's precious little children will be making decisions that impact the world. The ways they make decisions, the regularity with which they seek God's wisdom in life's choices, the kindness they show to others, the respect they have for authority, their work ethic, their devotion to a spouse or any commitment, the way they honor truth, how much they share and so on, and so on... all comes from somewhere doesn't it? Let's give a child our attention today. If there isn't one in your home, choose one to encourage at church or in sports or on their birthday. However we find to do it, remember the one that set the pattern for us all and what He has to say about the subject: "Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me' "(Mark 9:36,37).