

IS 'PLEASE' A CHOICE?

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Our good friend, Gary, asks his 5 year-old son, "Matt, help me with the dishes, please." To his father's shock the little boy says, "No thank you, dad." Gary repeats the request and Matt replies, "Dad, when you say 'please' it sounds like I can choose." Smart little cookie, that one! Matt wasn't trying to be cute or disobedient. He's very bright for his age and understands the meaning of so many things. Once Gary caught his breath, explained to Matt what he meant and rephrased the request, Matt was happy to help his dad.

I was raised, like you, to believe that manners are very important. 'Please' and 'thank you' were important to add to requests or when somebody did something for you. It is still very important to train our children to be polite. In the Southern States most children are raised to say, "Yes, sir" and "No, Ma'am" to their parents and others in authority. I like that, even though I was raised in another culture where we were taught to say, "Yes, Dad." "No, Mum." I like that, too.

Matt had found a loophole, just like so many people when it comes to paying taxes! It made me wonder how I would have phrased the request. Maybe it's a bit harsh to say, "Matt, get ya butt over here and do the dishes!" I guess I could have said, "You don't need to do this, Matt, but it would be nice if you could help me with the dishes." Now that's on the very weak side and is the other end of the scale. I could have said, "I'll give you five bucks to help me with the dishes." Now that's bordering on breaking the child labor laws and is not a good idea because we shouldn't be paying our kids for chores. We do chores because it's part of being a family member.

How about, "Matt, your mother and I are very tired from working all day to give you a good home and place food on the table. The least you could do is come and help me with the dishes!" Well, no, that's overplayed and rather on the begging side of life. It's way too much information and unnecessary. Maybe a good compromise would be, "Matt, I'd like you to come and help me with the dishes", or something similar.

While we're talking about politeness, it is important that we show gratitude to our children for the things they do for us. After Matt had finished helping with the dishes it would have been appropriate for Gary to give him a hug and say, "Thank you, Matt. I just love it when you do things to help us around the house." Kids love to please their parents, and if you reinforce the things they do with praise they are ready and willing to do it again. Give special reinforcement to your kids when you see that they have done something without being asked. They will repeat that behavior and help create a positive home environment.

Kids love to model on those that love them. When parents demonstrate gratitude to each other for things done, the kids will see this as normal expressions and do the same.

Teachers can tell a lot about their students' homes by the actions and attitudes displayed by the children in their class. What a delight it is to have children who are so well trained that you wish you had a classroom full of them! When their parents come for an event at the school and you get into conversation with them you soon know why their children are so respectful and willing to help. The opposite is true, too. Unfortunately, there are some rude and bullying children. Meet their parents and you quickly understand why. So sad!

God created us to live in families and they are the basis of an effective society. When families break down, so does society. That is not what the Lord planned. Whatever society or our culture is currently saying, I encourage you to always value politeness and good manners. I am finding that many parents are not training their children to uphold what has held families and society together for thousands of years.

We can't afford to let the teaching of values and manners slip or leave it to the schools to do. It is our responsibility to create well-mannered children with great values who are going to be extraordinary adults.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.