

WHAT'S IN A NAME

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I have always been fascinated by names. I ask any parents with a new baby what they have named him or her. I have no idea where this penchant came from except that I have come to realize that our names definitely define us.

From ancient times, parents would name the child using a word that best described what they wanted the child to become e.g. a mighty warrior, a great hunter, to be wise, gentle, or brave, and then guide them towards becoming just that. They believed that a name defined the child's destiny. If this is so, then we, as parents, carry a big responsibility in choosing names that will positively influence our children. Yet, there are probably as many reasons as there are names, as to how we were blessed with the names we got. Maybe we were named after favorite Uncle Percy or cousin Mabel. My kids were named after TV and movie characters, but we did check their meanings before we labeled them. However it is that we decide on names for our kids, we need to remember that their name can influence them for the rest of their lives.

There is one, now famous, Biblical character that would not let his name negatively influence him. Jabez means 'born out of pain'. He should have been angry at having to bear the shame of such a name all his life, but he chose to use it for the good. 1 Chronicles 4 v 10 says that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. Instead of becoming a 'pain', Jabez cried out to God, asking for four things. "Please bless me. Please enlarge my territory (coast). Please keep your hand on me for protection and strength. Please keep me from evil and trouble so I will not be a man of sorrow or cause pain. All of his requests were so that he could be a greater blessing to others. Good for Jabez! If names define us, then we can safely say that our families define us as well.

As parents, we do not only have the responsibility of giving our children defining names, we are also responsible for creating direction and purpose for our families. This creates a family identity. Now, I admit that when our kids were toddlers, it was all we could do to get through one day at a time, let alone next week. However, I didn't realize just how much easier life would have been if we had spent some time really giving thought to what we wanted our family identity to be and then let that influence our decisions from then on. I have heard many people say, "Oh well, it's in the genes. I can't help how I am. None of our family was great, so our family won't be great. We are just your average Joe Blows and we just weren't destined to be movers and shakers." Many don't even realize that it is possible to rise above that thinking, like Jabez, to create a 'family footprint' *you* are happy with. Maybe it needs to be different from how you were raised.

To create a positive identity, the first thing to do is to create a statement of belief e.g. We, the Smith family, believe that to be successful our family needs to be God-centered, parent-directed, family-orientated and outwardly-focused (caring for others). From this point you are able to create a set of strong family values.

When you explain and train your kids to meet your expectations, giving praise and grace for mistakes, and then applying consequences for non-conformance, you will see a positive difference in your family. They will feel connected, valued, and secure because they know exactly what is expected of them. Because of direction, purpose and structure being established, there will be a lot more time to enjoy each other, go out and have fun and make a positive difference in the community. You will be defined by what others see your family doing.

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.