

# Breaking Attention

*Getting our children's ears with grace for God's sake*

Children of any age are great at breaking things ... except breaking their attention from something that captures their interest. By breaking attention I mean having children and young people stop what they are doing and listen. This requires that they desire and value input from the authorities in their lives; so much so that when this authority speaks, they stop. This needs to be a goal of parenting. It starts when children are first able to understand, and it is not too late for even the oldest of children.

We need to help children understand that when we are speaking, they need to listen. Remember that by listening I mean not just hearing the words but embracing their meaning and purpose. That means they need to be willing to stop their playing with toys, video games, reading, or watching television, in order to hear your words. Of course, being sensitive to what they are doing keeps us from simply frustrating them. But the bottom line is they must desire to hear instruction.

In a culture where everyone's opinion and action is considered valid and equal, it will require real training to help our children realize that God has called them to be under authority. Their desire to do what they want to do is not equal to your desires, instructions, or commands. They must understand that. They must understand that you have been given authority by God to speak truth into their lives. You are responsible to do so.

Now, how to do it? "Lording it over them" will be a strictly authoritarian expression of your position. It will tear down relationships. It will build walls. Being a gracious authority will win your children over by telling them truth. That starts by *how* you think. You must begin by thinking "There is no place I'd rather be than having this conversation with my child. I love them and I see this as a God-ordained moment!" Then the "when" of this teaching and training of truth takes place in an atmosphere of peace, NOT when you are engaged in a battle. That means there must be scheduled times to talk about the issues of life. Family devotions around the table, at night before bed, first thing in the morning; these can all provide times of low key interaction. Lastly, lose the lecture mode. Engage in a dialogue. Ask questions. Suggest issues or circumstances that might tempt them to not break attention, and ask them why it is hard to stop. Talk to them about what is going on in their heart when they don't break attention. ("I will be god. I will determine who to listen to, when to listen, and whether I want to listen!") Lastly, identify yourself with them in their need, that just like them we struggle with wanting all of life to revolve around us and our desires. We want to direct our children to the One we turn to for forgiveness, strength, and grace. Jesus can put the desire to hear inside of us.

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