

# The Example We Impart

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Yesterday, my autistic daughter was looking over my shoulder as I was perusing my Twitter home page. She left the room with a nervous giggle and returned to the doorway several minutes later. With a smile that I recognized as her way of conveying that she wanted to say something, but couldn't come up with the right words, she stood there silently. Unlike other teenagers who are never at a loss for words, she lives with an additional handicapping condition that challenges her ability to express herself verbally. Finally, I asked her what was on her mind. She started to speak, nervously giggled, and shuffled as she was obviously trying to phrase words in her mind before speaking. After several encouraging prompts and additional assurances that I genuinely was interested in what she was trying to say, she finally blurted out, "Are you having an affair?"

Realizing her limited understanding of words adults fully comprehend, including their implications, I calmly told her that I wasn't. I followed up my response with an invitation for her to sit beside me and talk about what she had asked. When I asked why she posed that question, she pointed to my computer and the same Twitter page and said, "You have pictures of pretty ladies." I took the time to show her that the pictures and names on that page included men and women with whom I keep in contact, many of whom I have not had the privilege of ever meeting face-to-face. With the same impulsivity as before, satisfied with the explanation I had offered, she said "okay" and left my side to return to her school work.

That brief exchange reminded me that others are oftentimes judging us by nothing more than that first impression, a snapshot of a moment in time. Unfortunately, while the mind of the observer has been working overtime in filling in the details of that freeze-frame of our reality, life-long impressions are formed in ignorance of who we are and what we believe. Transposing this concept to our relationship with our children, the impressions we leave with them are more likened to a perpetual video stream. It is in moments such as I shared with my daughter that we have the opportunity to "edit" misconceptions in that feed. However, we do not have that luxury in the first impressions we leave with those outside our family.

Every person we meet instinctively formulates a lasting judgment based upon nothing more than that moment-in-time snapshot, irregardless of accuracy. When it is known that we profess to be a disciple of Christ, the minds-eye of the observer shifts to something akin to time-lapse photography, gathering glimpses of our reality and our faith with which to judge us and our witness. Over a period of three years, alongside His teachings, Jesus offered His disciples an example of Kingdom life. During the course of eighteen years, we have the opportunity to mold the lives of children He has entrusted to our care by our example. Throughout our daily lives, in the blink of an eye, we have the opportunity to offer a glimpse of the kingdom to everyone we encounter by the example we convey.

What would we see if we could view our life and example through our children's eyes? What would we perceive if we could see that momentary glimpse of our life and our faith offered to total strangers? Would the one we profess is Lord of our lives accept the example we impart?