

# Friday Focus

## From Emory

### *Manners Matter*

My mama used to keep a switch above the exhaust hood on the stove at our house when I was growing up (I DO suppose that she has thrown that switch away by now). This evil little stick was procured for the expressed purpose of reinforcing in me her rules of table manners and etiquette expected at our family dinner table. Her chair at dinner was conveniently located in proximity to her arm's reach of that little branch (and my left arm).

Topics of daily assessment included: fork in the hand positioning, proper grammar, conversation topics, bodily noises, elbow/table contact, chewing with a closed mouth, among other things, but most any other area of observable pre-adolescent behavior was a potential area for immediate feedback.

My mom knew that the habits which are formed early in a child's interactions with parents and authority follow them into more formal settings. She also recognized that how youngsters relate to others and how they see themselves is crucial to determining the level of function they have in dealing with people. A person's respect for authority reveals itself in the display of manners and in etiquette.

Honor and respect are two areas that have begun to fade from the daily training children receive at home. In our culture, families rarely sit down to eat dinner together. The statistics are staggering and downright depressing. A by-product of current family lifestyle is a generation growing up not understanding, and certainly not appreciating, the need for honoring others with appropriate behavior and actions in social situations. On-the-go meals and in-front-of-the electronic device dinners are robbing families of teachable moments that have far-reaching effects on children—especially our boys.

Third graders at PCS have, for years, been exposed to formal training in manners and etiquette and have made a tradition of a Mother's Tea toward the end of the school year. We appreciate Cyndy Horner and her leadership in this area of our school.

Also, Bonnie Chancey, one of our Latin teachers, recognized the need for the training of our students in proper protocol and took it upon herself several years ago to begin formal training for our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys and girls in several areas. The Antebellum Gala that is coming up in a few weeks is the culmination of this training.

I've received some very supportive and also some quite interesting comments from parents over the course of time that we have been doing these activities, reinforcing the need to explain just exactly how this fits into the context of our school and why we think it is biblical.

The need for appropriate respect and honor of those in authority is certainly a biblical principle. In fact, in a learning environment, it may be one of the most important factors that determine the level of achievement and the atmosphere of excellence in the classroom.

A young man's ability to show respect for women when he is young has a direct correlation to how he responds later in life in this area, and that will set the tone for his own home and children.

Good manners do matter:

Boys should be taught to open doors for women. They should seat their mother at the dinner table. These are not arbitrary or random cultural practices which have no meaning. They

are a constant daily reminder to males—whose lusts when unmortified always degrade women—that women must not be degraded, but rather honored. Manners are therefore a form of sexual discipleship; they are sexual discipline. A boy who has learned to honor women everywhere will have difficulty in despising one in the back seat of a car.  
Douglas Wilson, *Future Men* p.136.

The potential respect of women by boys begins with their mother, and how they react and respond to her in communication sets the tone for every relationship they have in the future with women. Boys who don't respect their mothers turn that disrespect to their teachers, and eventually to their wives. One of the initial exposures of impropriety in the area of respect is often uncovered by pre-school and primary grade teachers. This must be addressed and corrected. The resistance to making these corrections is surprising to some outside of education; the resistance often comes from the moms themselves.

Sometimes moms confuse *relationship* with *obedience* in dealing with their boys. Good mom/son communication and the fact that she might feel especially close to her son is not necessarily a direct link to his obedience. Some of the best 'smoozers' (defined: smooth-talking male full of baloney) are trained at home by sweet-talking their mothers in sit-down discussions.

In order for a son to grow up with proper respect, there must be a careful blend of toughness with respect. That's where the dad makes a perfect completion of the parenting team. In the absence of the dad's proper influence, a mom's task is more difficult, but not impossible.

Another truth to the parenting task is that the larger the boy gets the more obedient he should become (unfortunately the opposite is often true).

Schools, and especially female teachers, are the objects of many boys' disrespect. For the health of the young man, and for the proper instructional atmosphere in a school, this must be corrected and the appropriate level of respect must be maintained.

Disciplined thinking and control of 'passions':

"Over the top" un-checked passion toward any desire the boy has at age 10 sometimes seems innocent, but if the pattern goes unchecked, it manifests itself in the unbridled pursuit of temptation and desires at age 17. If we want our teenagers to be sexually pure at 17, the practice of discipline and self-control will need to have been reinforced and practiced well before they are faced with those temptations.

Parents, you can help the school and your son by making him accountable for respect issues from the first day he sets foot on our campus. Help him to learn to respect and obey authority (even, and maybe *especially*, female authority). Requiring obedience is not 'picking on' your sons, it is in fact one of the greatest services teachers can offer you in the rearing of your boys.

Parents, help the coach 'coach' your son's attitude. Help us teach them patience, courage, persistence, and virtue. These are the very things that will make them loving husbands, great fathers, and loyal church lay-leaders. Sometimes they will be forced to do some things that make them uncomfortable, tired, and challenged. That is GOOD!

Teachers, set forth the standards of respect—require them from your students from day one and don't budge. You can be friendly, but be careful not to become a student's friend. The task of pushing a student to another level academically, spiritually, and emotionally is often rewarding, but it is sometimes grueling. In order for you to exert godly influence there must be a level of respect and honor that is consistent and ever-present.