

The Little Things
5 simple ways to let your kids know you love 'em
By John Trent

We busy dads are always looking for new ways to grow closer to our kids. Sometimes we think we need tons of time to make this connection—like regular "date nights" with each child or weekend camping trips with just Dad and the kids. Dates and camping trips are great, but it's actually the little things—done over time and with a loving heart—that do the trick for kids. Try some of these and watch the connections happen.

Catch a Conversation

Grab a ball and play catch or shoot hoops with your child. Between throws (or shots), ask a question like:

"What's the best thing about school these days?"

(Toss)

"What's the worst thing about school these days?"

(Toss)

"If you could only eat one food for the next month, what would it be?"

(Toss)

"What would your dream vacation be like?"

(Toss)

A game of catch offers just enough distraction for kids to open up about issues they might not normally talk about.

Be a "Mail Man"

On your child's next birthday, cover a shoebox with wrapping paper and a label that says, "Mail from Dad." Each year on your child's birthday, write a letter that's not to be read until you give your child the box—on his 18th birthday, the day he goes to college, his wedding day, whatever feels right for you. Use these letters to express your love, to praise his strengths and gifts, to offer specific prayers, and to share your hopes for the person he'll be one day.

Pebbles of Truth is a ministry of House on the Rock Family Ministries (www.hotrfm.org).

This worksheet is designed to complement the Pebbles of Truth radio feature heard on WJTL Saturday, June 26, 2010. If you missed the spot, or want to hear it again, you can listen to it on our website <http://www.pebblesoftruth.com>.

Serve Up Love

When our oldest daughter, Kari, was 5, she had nights when she simply didn't want to go to bed. We'd do a story and snack, check under the bed for monsters, pray one more time, then move to the epic showdown of small will against parental will. One night, when Kari asked for a drink of water as her last appeal, I almost reflexively said no. But then I said, "How many ice cubes do you want in your cup?"

Kari leaned back to see if I was serious. "Five," she said.

I got her water—with five ice cubes. She took a drink, climbed into bed, and went to sleep. From that night on, I became the water boy.

Such bedtime rituals give me a chance to connect with each of my children. It might extend bedtime by a minute or two, but like dimes adding up to dollars, investing in these moments can create a lifetime of closeness.

Team Up

Pick a chore, and do it with your child. The work gets done faster and, more importantly, you'll spend another chunk of time with one of your children.

Laura, our 11-year-old, hates making her bed. One morning I dropped by her room to remind her that we needed to leave in a few minutes. Her bed was still unmade.

"Help me do something," I said, taking one side of her sheets and blankets. As I started making one side of the bed, she fell in, making the other. In a minute the deed was done.

Making Laura's bed together has become part of our morning ritual. I don't get to drive her to school often, so making the bed is my chance ask about her upcoming day or to find out how I can pray for her.

Keep Watch

How many times have you said you'd pray for your kids—and then forgotten? I used to do that often until I started setting my watch for prayer.

If Kari says she has a big history test that day, I ask her what time she takes the test, then set my watch to beep at that time. No matter where I am when it beeps, I stop and pray for my child right then. If I didn't set the alarm, I would completely forget my promise.

This not only helps me remember to keep my promise to pray, but the act of setting my watch in front of my daughter shows her she is a priority. It's another simple way to show my child that she's a precious part of my life.

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