

Excerpt “Training Children to be Strong in Spirit”

By Michael Pearl

Leaders and Followers

Society is composed of leaders and followers. It cannot be otherwise. Followers are essential to the overall good of society. Every engine needs a coal car and a caboose, as every visionary and entrepreneur needs capable men to carry out the vision. But every business needs a manager, and every shift needs a supervisor. Every department needs a head. Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile and he didn't build it. Men working by the hour built his empire.

There is no loss of self-esteem or personal satisfaction in spending your life fulfilling someone else's vision, but I covet the number one position for my children. I would rather not see them working by the hour, hoping for overtime, fearing a lay off, and concerned as to whether or not they can pay the mortgage. Strong spirited children grow up with a belief they can do it better. Strong spirited individuals are not afraid of failure, for they know that with further effort they will find the path to great success. They keep trying, and they enjoy the struggle.

First born sons

It is a widely known and accepted fact that the leaders of nations, corporations, and military commanders are usually first born sons. First born sons are naturally thrust into leadership positions by virtue of their age, superior knowledge and strength. You expect the three-year-old to take responsibility for his little brother's safety. The three-year-old shares in the training and instruction of his younger brother. The older brother learns to relate to life as a leader and the younger brother learns to relate as a follower, waiting to be told what to do, expecting to be countermanded in his decisions, and leaning to accept it as the way of things.

The rule is confirmed by the exception. When there are five or more years separating brothers, the younger is likely to be a functional first born. Since his brother is too old to be his immediate overseer, the young boy faces responsibilities just as would a first born.

Like a first born, functional first-borns mainly spend their initial years of life interacting with adults rather than their peers, so they are socialized by the more intelligent and sophisticated members of society. And when there are five or more years separating a child from his older siblings, he does not have any competition, and his brothers and sisters are more likely to relate to him as adults, encouraging instead of competing.

When Nathan my son dropped by today, I read to him some of what you just read and he shared a couple observations that will be helpful. Nathan, offering an explanation as to why firstborns are the dominate leaders, said, “It is easy to give the older kid the responsibilities because he or she already has skills and will perform the task much more quickly and efficiently, but that leaves the younger children as observers of life rather than doers. The answer is to take care to put the younger children through the same regiment of responsibility as we did the older children.” That's wise indeed. Learn from anybody you can.

King David, the eighth son of Jessie, was a functional firstborn. He had dominant older brothers, but we find him in the hills alone with sheep where he successfully defended them against a bear and a lion. As a lad he slew a giant in a duel, and went on to be a great general and warrior, a musician, and the most quoted poet in all history, eventually becoming the greatest king of Israel.

On the Farm

It is not necessary for second born sons to grow up with a follower's frame of mind. The one place where I often see several brothers in the same family as confident leaders is on the farm. When I drive by and see my neighbor's seven-year-old driving the tractor, delivering hay to the cows in the pasture, I know he will be strong in spirit. He is given responsibility according to his ability and he fulfills his duty with confidence that he is important in the daily flow of life. He has older brothers but they are not out there telling him he is not doing it right. He is the "first born" when he is commanding that big tractor and managing a herd of cows. I conclude it is not the order of birth or the personality type one displays early in life that determines the confidence and leadership qualities of a man; it is his early life experiences.

The Overcoming Amish Man

I have told the story before, but it bears repeating here. Years ago, when we first relocated to the country and began to minister to the Amish community several of the young people felt a call to missions. In preparation, they decided to go to a mission's oriented Bible College located out of state. One young man about 25 years old who had been raised Amish and had about a fifth grade education said he wanted to go to college. When he expressed his interest, I knew I had to talk him out of it. He was not worldly wise. He could read but not well, and had never developed study habits. I didn't want him to be crushed by failure, so I explained how hard it was going to be and what it is like to study for test night after night, week end after week end, month after month. He had been raised outdoors, walking behind a matched pair of mules or Belgium plow horses, never confined to books and study halls.

When I suggested he might not be able to make the grade, he looked amused and took on an air of patience as he said, "I can shoe any mule or horse, castrate a full grown bull, fix any motor, repair any farm equipment, and break a wild mustang to pull a buggy. I have never tried anything and failed to do it; I can do this also. Such ill placed confidence! But I was wrong. I had underestimated the power of a strong human spirit. He went to college with his whole family—wife and kids. He struggled, studying long hours to make Ds his first semester. Moved up to C's his second, and then started making some B's. He did it because he was "strong in spirit."

John the Baptist was not deterred by unbelief and ridicule because he was strong in spirit. Nor did his spirit fail when he was cast into prison, and it was still strong when they severed his head from his tough body. After John's death, Jesus said that of those born of women there was not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

The world is an unfriendly place and growing more hostile every day. As your children grow strong bodies, train them to be strong in spirit as well.

Remedial training

When my son Nathan was about eight years old, his aunt invited him over to bring her five year old son out of his timidity. He had a weak spirit—fearful of venturing into the woods fifty feet from their house. The little fellow was tall for his age but he grew up in the shadow of his older sister and lacked masculine boldness. So Nathan went over for the day and took along his gear—backpacks, knives, sling shots, BB gun, canteen, etc. He led his cousin out into the "wilds" where they spent the day conquering nature. They discovered and captured various creatures—frogs, turtles, grub worms, beetles, bugs, and the like. They swung on grape vines,

climbed trees, and built a “fort,” conquering and dominating a two acre vacant lot. That was the day Cousin became an outdoorsman. To this day, Cousin is the bold outdoorsman, hunting, fishing, and spending the night deep into the river basins, coming out in the morning with more food than he can carry. If the world fell into a starvation mode, Cousin would be the man to know. In another day long ago, he would have been called “the food gatherer.”

The difference between a child continuously sitting in front of an LED screen and one sitting in the top of a tree waiting for the game to enter “the kill zone”, is the difference in a strong spirit of confidence and a weak and timid spirit that lacks confidence.