

Spiritual Tip

The School for Animals

By Rick Warren

Once upon a time, there were some animals that wanted to start a school for animals. They decided the courses would include running, climbing, swimming, and flying. Then they decided that all of the animals should take all of the courses.

That's where the problem started. The duck was better than his teacher at swimming, but he only made passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. So they made him drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his webbed feet to be badly worn, and his grade dropped to average in swimming. But everybody felt less threatened and more comfortable with that — except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but because of so much make-up work in swimming, he caught pneumonia and had to drop out of school. The squirrel showed outstanding ability in climbing, but he was extremely frustrated in flying class because the teacher insisted that he start from the ground up rather than the treetop down. He developed Charlie horses from over-extension, so he only got a "C" in climbing and a "D" in running. The eagle was the problem student and was disciplined for being a nonconformist. For instance, in climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but he insisted on flying to get there. Finally, because he refused to participate in swimming class, he was expelled.

The point is that God has designed specific animals to excel in specific areas, and he doesn't expect them to do all the other things. When you expect everybody to fit in the same mold, all you're going to get is frustration, discouragement, mediocrity, and failure. A duck is made to be a duck and not something else.

And you were made to be you. God has given you unique abilities, and he wants you to use them the way he intended.

Your abilities are the map to God's will for your life. It points the direction. When you know what you're good at, then you can know what God wants you to do with your life.

The Bible says in Hebrews 13:21, "May he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him" (NLT).

Talk It Over

- What are your spiritual gifts?
- Based on your SHAPE — your spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences — what do you think God wants you to do with your life?
- How has trying to excel in an area that does not fit your SHAPE kept you from serving at your best?

Marriage Tip

How To Ignite Intellectual and Emotional Intimacy

By Gary Chapman

Most of us did not get married in order to find a convenient way to cook meals, wash dishes, do laundry, and rear children. We married out of a deep desire to know and to be known; to love and to be loved.

We wanted to have a genuinely intimate relationship.

So how does this lofty goal become a reality like above? It helps to look at the different essential components of an intimate relationship. Below we will discuss two of them.

Sharing Your Thoughts

This is intellectual intimacy. So much of life is lived in the inner, invisible world of the mind. Throughout the day we have hundreds of thoughts about life as we encounter it. We also have desires, things we would like to experience or obtain.

Intellectual intimacy comes in sharing some of these thoughts and desires with your spouse. These may focus on finances, food, health, crime, music, or church. These thoughts and desires reveal something about what has gone on in your mind throughout the day.

In marriage, we have the pleasure of learning some of the inner movements of our spouse's mind. That is the essence of intellectual intimacy.

Sharing Your Emotions

Emotional intimacy is another component of an intimate relationship.

Feelings are our spontaneous, emotional responses to what we encounter through the five senses. I hear that the neighbor's dog died and I feel sad. I see the fire truck racing down the road and I feel troubled. You touch my hand and I feel loved. I see you smile and I feel encouraged.

Everyone's inner life is filled with emotions, but no one sees them. It is the sharing of feelings that builds emotional intimacy.

Allowing your spouse into your inner world: being willing to say, "I'm feeling a lot of fear right now" or, "I am really happy tonight." These are statements of self-revelation.

Learning to talk about emotions can be one of the most rewarding experiences in life.

Such sharing requires an atmosphere of acceptance.

If I am assured that my spouse will not condemn my feelings or try to change my feelings, then I am far more likely to talk about them.

Adapted from **The Family You've Always Wanted** by Gary Chapman. Find out more at www.5lovelanguages.com.

Parenting Tip

Simple Communication Tips for Parents

By Denis Donovan, MD, Children's Center for Developmental Psychiatry

Tired of trying to get your children to behave? The problem might be simply a matter of miscommunication...(on your part).

Here are some tips:

Don't use a question instead of a command.

Parents often question their kids instead of telling them what to do.

Don't ask an "empty" question -- one that doesn't even hint at what you want the child to do.

Example: A woman who wants her son to stop pushing boxes around in a toy store asks, "Do you want a spanking?" The child keeps pushing. Louder, she asks, "What did I just say?" Still no response. The child does not connect her questions with his actions. She should directly state what she wants him to do -- "Stop pushing those boxes."

Don't pose negative questions -- which invite negative responses.

Example: When you ask your child, "Can't you clean your room?" he/she is likely to respond

with a simple "No." Or he will think, "Sure. But I don't want to." Again, just tell him, "Clean your room."

Don't end statements with "okay?" or "all right?"

Parents who do this may be looking for acknowledgment that the child has heard them -- "Put on your boots, okay?"... "We're going to be leaving soon, all right?" But the child thinks he is being asked for his permission. Simply state what you want your child to do -- "Put on your boots."

Don't speak as "we".

When you use "we", you take responsibility for the very behavior you are trying to influence. Your child hears "we" and decides that no action is required of him.

Example: "We're going to do better on our homework next time."... "Shall we take out the garbage?"

Say "you" when you want your child to take responsibility.

Don't refer to yourself as Mommy or Daddy.

Parents tend to do this as a way of maintaining a connection with their children.

It is easier to say, "Don't talk that way to Daddy" or "Don't pull Mommy's

hair" than it is to admit that your child is not being nice to you.

Children over age two-and-a-half use and understand personal pronouns, such as "I" and "me", and possessives, such as my or mine. Say, "Don't talk that way to me"... "Don't pull my hair."

Don't depersonalize objectionable behavior by saying "it".

When you use the word "it", you are not specific about what your child did.

Describe exactly what bothered you so your child can take responsibility.

Example: Instead of saying, "It was a terrible day," say, "You misbehaved all day." Instead of "It was one of the most embarrassing experiences I ever had," say, "When you told your teacher to bug off during the parent-teacher conference, I was really embarrassed."

Don't explain.

Some parents always explain why they are asking children to do something -- "Don't run into the street or you'll get hit by a car"... "Stop interrupting. It's rude."

Always giving kids reasons trains them to automatically ignore any command that is not accompanied by an explanation. They will always ask, "Why?" before they listen. Issue the command with no explanation. If your

child asks why, reply, "Because I say so."

Many parents are surprised to find that children accept this -- and listen.

Denis Donovan, MD, medical director, Children's Center for Developmental Psychiatry, St. Petersburg, Florida. He is coauthor of **What Did I Just Say!?!: How New Insights into Childhood Thinking Can Help You Communicate More Effectively with Your Child** (Holt).

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