

Are Your Children Friendly?

Many of our children are not as friendly and outgoing as they need to be.

By Ronald Kelly

Every parent wants to be well pleased with his children.

We all enjoy the compliments of others, such as, "My, what obedient children you have." Or, "How did you ever get them to be so well-mannered?" Or, "Those are the best-behaved children we have ever had in this restaurant."

These comments are well and good — many of you parents have heard such comments often because God has shown you how to properly rear your children to be respectful, kind, obedient.

But maybe you have become accustomed to those comments. Perhaps you are relaxing your child-rearing practices.

What kind of job are you doing? Have you been diligent? Or have you let down — eased off? Have your children been progressing? How do they act? Not just in the street, in the restaurant or in the store, but to friends, relatives and brethren in the Church?

How are they with others?

When you walk into Sabbath services or visit a friend, what do your children say? How do they respond? Does your 4-year-old just stand there? Does your 2½-year-old start to cry? Or your 13-monther run to Mommy and hide in her skirt?

This is too often the case! Too many of our children are actually fearful of other people. Some cannot tell their names. Others rebelliously (which we excuse by saying they are bashful) won't tell how old they are

when someone asks. These things ought not be, and there is something every parent can do about it.

More than 1,900 years ago, Jesus Christ sat talking with a group of His disciples. Apparently, a number of townspeople began to gather around and many brought their children with them. They specifically wanted Christ to lay hands upon their children and bless them.

The disciples thought Christ was too busy and could not take the time to talk with these children. But let's read about it in Mark 10:13-16:

"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer [permit] the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

Did you notice it?

Christ said, "Of such [meaning the small children] is the kingdom of God." How were these children? Do you suppose when He picked them up they began to pull His hair, kick at Him and claw and scratch while they screamed, "Put me down, put me down"? No! These children were not like that at all!

Then let's take it a step further.

Would they begin to cry for fear when Christ picked them up? Did they reach out with both arms and cry, "I want my mommy, I want my mommy"?

Did Christ pick up a fearful, trembling child who cried so loud Jesus could scarcely be heard, and then say, "Of such is the kingdom of God"? It is obvious the children didn't cry and try to struggle out of His arms.

Well, then, did they perhaps just sit there quietly without crying? Maybe they didn't pull His hair, but were they embarrassed? Were they timid and shy?

Did they hang their heads and not answer Him when He asked their names or how old they were or what they liked to do? Did He have to beg and coerce them to talk by offering candy — did He work with them for hours to get them to say, "Hi"? Of course not. These children were not timid, shy, reticent or backward.

What were they like?

God did not preserve exactly what these little children did do, but there are plenty of examples all through the Bible to show parents how children should behave.

Stop and think. What was Christ illustrating? Obviously, He did not mean we should be like a little 4- or 5-year-old child in action or mind.

Christ picked up those children, laid His hands on them, blessed them and said, "Of such is the kingdom of God." The way those children conducted themselves — their attitudes — their warmth, friendliness, submission, respect, complete dependence, open faith — this was the emphasis.

Think of how we are to be toward God's laws, in relationship to our Father in heaven and to Jesus Christ. That is just the attitude displayed by

these little children Christ picked up and used as an example for us!

But we can also learn a big lesson in child rearing from this story. We should all have children Christ could pick up and say, "Of such is the kingdom of God." But how many of our children could He even pick up? How many would be rebellious? How many would cry? How many would be shy and not even speak a word to Him? Far too many.

We don't have to look too deeply into our lives to see we need to work on this. Every year God's Church follows Christ's example in the service of the blessing of the children.

Each year just after the Feast of Tabernacles God's ministers follow Christ's example and lay hands on the little children, asking God's blessing on them. Many times events transpire just as I have related already.

Some children begin to cry when they see the minister coming. Some clamor and struggle to get back into the arms of their parents. Some scream so loud the minister hardly feels his prayer can be heard. Still others very shyly won't tell their names so the minister can be specific when asking God to bless little Johnny, Susie, Jane or Tommy.

These things can be corrected. They *must be* if we are really God's people and want to rear our children according to God's method, which, after all, is the only real way to true happiness.

So often I have asked a 3- or 4-year-old child his name, only to be stared at — or to see the child run the other way. Speaking somewhat humorously, maybe I am something to run from, but this shouldn't be the case with everyone.

In such circumstances the parent is always more embarrassed than the child. Mother might say, "Mr. Kelly wants to know your name, Johnny." The child remains quiet. Mother then might say, "Tell Mr. Kelly your name!" The child is still quiet. "I said tell him your name," repeats Mother. The child puckers up and starts to cry.

"If you don't learn to speak, I'll spank you good and hard," emphasizes Mother again. The child hasn't been touched yet, but now begins to cry desperately. Finally Mother in desperation and exasperation says:

"Oh, he's always been bashful. What can I do about it?"

What you can do

You might think the first thing we would say is that you should spank the living daylights out of this bashful, shy, reticent little child. Not so.

When an event such as the one above transpires, you, as a parent, are on the spot. You might even become angry! The first thing you should not do in such a case is spank the child in anger or embarrassment to cover up your failure to train him or her.

Spanking may very well be a part of what you will employ, but since it has gone this far, spanking in a moment of frustration before the minister will not solve the problem.

So how do you begin? How can you have friendly children?

Jesus Christ taught His disciples a very important principle by which we always need to live:

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16-20).

This principle can be applied in many facets of life. But specifically, let's apply it to our child-rearing methods.

The Bible often refers to children as the fruit of our own lives. They are

in nature, character and, most of the time, even in looks much like we are.

Then by applying that principle — "by their fruits you shall know them" — in evaluating our children, others will know exactly how we as parents really are!

And here is the answer to much of your problem.

How are you with your children? How do you act as husband and wife in the confines of your own home? What kind of family atmosphere is there in your home? Is it one of real warmth, friendliness, open happiness? Or are you a little bit shy and somewhat backwards yourself?

If you grumble and complain from morning to night — and if your chil-



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dren see and hear you grumble and complain from morning to night — no matter what you tell them to be, your children will never be warm and friendly and courteous on the Sabbath day. Your child won't politely and hap-

pily tell his name or his age — he won't smile and laugh with others.

If you expect your child to be friendly and happy on the Sabbath when you are with fellow Church brethren, it has to be something that he actually is every day of his life.

And, of course, if your child is allowed to squall and cry all during the week, if he is allowed to hang his head in embarrassment and shame, if he is allowed to whine and rebel every single day of his life, nothing more can be expected in public than to have to suffer the shame of a rebellious and whiney child.

In short, your example — the way you live — is far more important than what you say to your child! That is, if your example is backed up by the proper discipline and correct punishment every time it is needed.

The way we get up in the morning, the way we come home from work — yes, everything we do — our children are absorbing and reacting to what they see and hear.

You might have thought everything was just fine in your home. You possibly have a nice home, a reasonably happy family, on the whole. Your children, chances are, are much better behaved than the average child.

But is this enough?

If they are reticent and afraid — if they are not developing happy, outgoing personalities — is it enough just to be better than the average hostile, rebellious child? No!

Do you begin the day with a bright, happy "Hi there, kids"? What is the first thing your children see? What do they hear?

In many homes, it may go something like this: "Oh, I hate to get up this morning." Or, "What a miserable night that was." Or, perhaps, "Will you get out of bed and fix the coffee?"

And the wife then may sleepily reply, "Get up and get it yourself!" Perhaps a squabble or a small spat results and all the time the children watch, see and drink in of an unfriendly, unhappy environment.

Maybe you manage to get out of bed without grumbling, but what about when the children want to play with you a few moments before they go off to school or before you start out for work? Do you brush them aside? Do you always tell them there's not

enough time to play with them?

Then do you rush off to catch the bus to work or do you jump in your car and screech down the street, trying desperately to make it on time after brushing the children off?

What about when you come home from work? Is it a happy, joyful reunion with the family and children? Do the children see Mommy and Daddy give each other a big hug and kiss? Do you pick the children up and play with each one of them and love each one of them?

Or is it just about like the morning when you come in: "What a rough day at the office!" Or, "Nothing went right today." And, perhaps, "That stupid boss of mine." And as you say all these things — as you fill the air with invective — do you push aside your children, letting them know that you haven't got time for them?

Get the picture? You may be happy for the most part. You might enjoy the Sabbath and Church services, but how are you enjoying every waking minute of every day?

Every minute detail — everything you say and do — is filling the minds of your children right in the confines of your own home.

The minds of your children are far more capable of registering and filing thoughts than one of our modern, complex computers in Pasadena.

Information must be carefully entered into these computers and then filed, then any needed answers can be given back by the machines. But they can only give back answers that have already been filed into them. And the machines

will give those same answers every time. Well, the mind of your child is

much more amazing than those computers. But just like them, when the child is called upon to react, he can react only the way information has been "filed" into his mind.

Words are not enough. He has seen an example — he has observed and heard many things besides what you might have told him on your way to Church services.

So first and foremost, if you expect your child to be happy and friendly, you are going to have to be happy, friendly, outgoing, warm *yourself*. Otherwise, the chances are your child will not react properly — he will not be able to really confidently meet people. In short, he will probably not be able to really enjoy a full, rich, abundant life as he ought.

After your example

Once you are sure you are making a diligent effort to set the right example, then you should begin to punish for refusing to speak.

If you have properly been working with your child and he doesn't react as he should in Sabbath services or in public, then that child must be properly punished so that he learns to do the right things and that he fears not to be obedient and respectful to other people.

It is vital to be totally aware of every developing facet of your child's character and personality.

A child is not naturally and normally always going to be perfect. There will be times when you will have to punish him for not answering properly — for not speaking when he ought.

But if you are consistent in your training, you will soon come to the point where it will be instilled as habit into your child, and you won't be publicly embarrassed by his bad examples. Rather, you can and will be well pleased with his training and progress.

But this can only result if you are properly setting the right example yourself and if you are diligently striving to have happy and obedient children according to God's principles. This is the only right way of child rearing. Let's go to work on it. Let's have friendly children! □

