

Coffee with Phil. 26. Leading a Strong Family

Introduction

Well, g'day and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to coffee with Phil. I'm just really glad you're with me today. I'm appreciative that you're taking the time to download to your device my ramblings, my thinkings, my journey, and look, I hope, and I pray that what I'm sharing with you today will really resonate with you, either for now or in the future, because the title of today's podcast is leading a strong family, and I'm really excited about this one, and I'll tell you why in the middle of the podcast.

But I wanna set it up first and foremost, I think this is a really important topic. I think this is actually a vital topic, because I see the massive issue across communities. Particularly in family situations, with parents shrinking back, I feel like I'm seeing more and more situations where parents are shrinking back from a position of leadership, a position of authority, a position of discipleship, and perhaps even correction, if I could say that.

And I would say this, when we shrink back as leaders, as parents, as those who influence younger people, we create this massive void, a big empty space that we are supposed to occupy. Now when we create that void, the empty space, it's kind of like a vacuum, it's going to be filled with something, and the problem we've got now is that because parents are ambivalent or absent, there's a void that creates a vacuum, the vacuum means that that space is filled with the wrong input. That means our young people are going onto the Internet and they are finding, ah, I just find this so crazy they find an influencer, or should I say, a person who calls himself an influencer, which is usually a young social media person that has no brains, except maybe good looks and a bit of clout on the Internet. But they base their decisions on what this influencer is saying or doing, and they structure their lives around the lives of someone they don't even know, or worst I suppose what I see, is young people giving advice to young people.

I was just shocked one day when I was sitting listening to a conversation, and this young person was giving marriage advice, and they've never even been in a relationship, and forgive me for my language. I'm a bit crude in how I describe this, but I just reckon it's the stupid leading the stupid. People with no wisdom, trying to lead other people who end up having no wisdom and so, hence the topic leading a strong family is something that I, you can tell I'm a bit passionate about, and I also have taken some correction in this myself through certain leadership situations, I've had to adjust my approach. I've had to apologise for my approach, and I've had to step up in situations that I previously would rather not have stepped up in, and in that correction I was counselled by someone older and wiser than me, and to be honest with you, I was also counselled and disciplined by the Holy Spirit, who is wisdom. But I was pointed to the story of David King David in the Bible, in 2 Samuel 13, if you will want to read a melodrama it's full of incest, and rape, and murder, and bad parenting, you can find all of that content in 2 Samuel Chapter 13, so I suggest you go and read it as an example of how not to live your life.

But in essence, David is, he takes his hands off the situation as the father of the men involved in the tragedy and the murder, he kind of is ambivalent and absent, and he gets chastised for it, and he's used as an example of how not to lead a strong family. So, I would turn it around and say the purpose of this

podcast is to lead young people well, that we should take a role of being an influencer, but an influencer that's motivated by love, not clicks, and motivated by grace and wisdom, not a social media following.

Book: Building a Strong Family

So let's get into this. The phrase leading a strong family comes on the back of a book that I wrote several years ago now, published, I think 2019, if I remember correctly, but it's a collection of stories. The book is called 'Building a Strong Family', and it's a collection of stories that I gathered together from 2009 when Kathy and I went on a journey.

The Lord said to me in 2008, I want you to take your family away, I want you to focus on rebuilding your family, and so hence this theme that comes through in the book. It's a collection of stories around what God showed to us as parents. It's me really sharing experiences, the good, the bad, and the ugly, as I say in the intro. But what happened is I sat down one night and I felt the Lord say, I want you to capture the story to share it with others, and the framework of the book came out in a download really, a moment of inspiration I was. I can still remember, I was lying on a bed in a cheap motel. The kids were asleep on one bed, Kathy's asleep beside me, I've got a small light on and I'm just furiously writing out on this sheet of yellow transcript paper, and the format for 'Building a Strong Family' just flowed out. There's a whole bunch of stories, about 15 chapters in here.

But I wanted to read you a couple of quotes because the book is full of anecdotal stories and wisdom that flows out of those stories, and here on page 119 I tell some stories around conquering the unknown. It's Chapter 9 heading 'Conquering the unknown' at the end of the chapter I say this, 'we've used these principles many times to help our children to break down fears and establish confidence', but now you have to read the book to find out what those principles are. But look, it says in the book, 'whether it's climbing trees, speaking to crowds, learning new things, overcoming negative emotions, making new friends or facing scary challenges, it's all the same, as parents we can build strength and to our family, on purpose and with purpose' and then there's a pull out quote at the bottom of the page that says this, 'help them', your children that is, 'help them to recognise and conquer their fears in a safe environment', so that's Chapter 9.

If I flick backwards, I think I've made a note here, page 66, is Chapter 4, and the heading for Chapter 4 is 'Adventures Build Memories' and I say this on page 66, 'From that time forward, we adopted adventure as one of our family values, we now seek out exciting opportunities to stretch our comfort zone together, and grow as a family through adventure type experiences, and we have discovered this is a mindset you can choose to apply at anytime, in any location'. So you can read more in the book 'Building a Strong Family'.

There's a wonderful quote here. I'm actually telling a story about a friend of mine called Jeff who tells me he's listening to the channel and catching up on episodes. So hello, Jeff. You'll remember our coffee that we had talking about this story, but there's a quote here it says this, 'There's an opportunity for adventure, which is presented by misadventure'. And you can enjoy the story about Jeff and his family that he gave me permission to share in Chapter 4.

If you're interested in that book just while I'm here, you'll see the link in the show notes in the references below. But you can just go to philstrong.com and on the front page you will be able to find the link to purchase that book. Why do I tell you that. Look, when I was lying on the bed in the hotel

room motel room in 2009, at the end of 2009, getting a bit of a download, there was actually two halves to that page of paper which I still have a copy of today. The top half was the first book called 'Building a Strong Family' and the second one was called 'Leading a Strong Family' and I wrote out no less than 15 principles that the Lord gave me, guiding principles on the back of experiences, good, bad, and ugly experiences that we had as a family, and you know I've never written that book, and This is why this podcast is so exciting, because I'm getting to share some of that content, albeit not in a published form, but certainly in this media channel.

So I want to speak to you today just a couple of things. There's four principles I've got written down here, out of that book. Well that non-book as it is, around leading a strong family. This is the second book that never happened and the reason for that I don't, look, it's just time focused priorities, energy, and it's all on me, so my bad. But the point is the first book is around building a strong family and it's really about building a solid foundation that allows you then to lead your family from a position of influence. You know, I see some pretty weak parenting that happens. Manipulation, depression, emotional control, and even strong arm tactics, or trickery, bribery, that are pretty weak parenting techniques, because parents are trying to create influence without building a foundation.

If you read the first book, you'll be able to build a foundation in your family. Kathy and I intentionally took time out at significant cost financially and emotionally, to invest into our kids, and I'm really proud to say that we've got some awesome kids now, our kids are amazing. I'm proud of them. They'll probably listen to this getting a little bit teary eyed because that's how the family rolls. But the point is we chose to build into our family, to build a foundation, that means that we now have a friendship with our kids that is amazing, and in fact you can read that in the epilogue of the first book because I wrote it 10 Years after I wrote the rest of the book.

Leading a Strong Family

But let's get into leading a strong family. I want to talk to you about principle #16 on my list that says, let your family see your weaknesses. Principle #16 on my list is, let your family see your weaknesses. Now you have to understand there needs to be a good foundation in place before you do this. We were travelling in the United States in 2009. We travelled from our base in Boise. We packed up our Chevy suburban truck and we put all our stuff into the back of it, and we headed off east, and we went through Yellowstone National Park, and we camped with bears, there's a funny story about that that's in the book.

But we got to Denver, Colorado and I'd noticed that the temperature gauge on the Chevy dashboard wasn't looking as good as I would like it to. I was a bit nervous because we had had a few mechanical issues with this vehicle. I'd spent as much on the vehicle as it cost me to buy it, which wasn't part of the plan. But I noticed that the gauge wasn't where I wanted it to, and all of a sudden, well, I remember we parked in a parking lot. I was a bit worried. I was saying what I'm going to do about this. I don't know anyone. I don't have a lot of money. This is really beyond my level of comfort, and out of the front of the truck came a pile of steam. The temperature shot through the roof, and I was devastated.

I was, look, I, it was a long season, I was at the end of my rope. I didn't have emotional reserves. I certainly didn't have solutions or answers, and I remember my head falling onto the steering wheel with a thud just in defeat, and I didn't know what to do. I was, inside I was crying out to God saying God, I can't handle this. I don't know what to do. It was a moment of weakness, but it was a visible moment of

weakness, and I remember at that time that Jackson, who was sitting in the back seat, he just piped up, chirped up, you know, he was 10 years old, so squeaky voice. But he's like, 'don't worry, dad, we'll work out what to do together', and at the moment I just felt strength come back into me because I realised I wasn't alone. I was the leader of the family, but I was being supported by those in the family and it made all the difference to me.

I remember, well, we got the radiator fixed and we sorted it out over a couple of days, and as a result of that layover in Colorado, we ended up down in Golden, Colorado, staying down there, and we had some amazing cool times while we're waiting for our truck. There was a time at the end of the year when we were in Florida and we had essentially run out of any reserves that would be able to help us survive, and we were living week by week on the provision of God, and the faith that was necessary to see God come through, and we told our kids about it. We prayed about it at dinner time. We held hands and we believed that God would provide for us, and I can tell you he did, every single time.

But the joy for me wasn't so much in the provision, it was in the evidence that my kids were seeing that God is faithful to love, protect, care for, and provide for every single one of his children, and I can remember walking into the post office like I was floating on clouds, with the ability to pay the rent on our apartment for that month. Why? Because God was faithful to provide.

So Principal #16 says, let your family see your weaknesses, and finally, the catch phrase for that is, they will grow stronger through it. So if you want to lead a strong family, you can let your family see your weaknesses and they will grow stronger through it.

As I cast my eye down the list I also see principle #18 on my list, it says this, you don't have to protect your kids all of the time, and that sounds like a horrible piece of parenting advice, but understand that many parents cotton wool their kids, they don't want them to have an experience of failure, or hurt, or harm, and so they insulate them, they protect them, and essentially they just grow their kids up to be babies in big, fat, flabby bodies, and the world's gonna be a horrible place because of it, because we're gonna have adults that don't know how to cope with life. And I'd say this, and I say it very carefully, and please don't hear me telling you to abuse your children, or leave them in danger, but here's what I wrote down, broken bones make for stronger bones. Broken bones make the stronger bones.

You know this because you've probably broken a bone before, but when a bone is reforming and healing itself, it calcifies, and now I'm not, I'm not very clever, so I don't know the science of that, but I do know that a bone that is broken when it reforms and calcifies, it's much stronger than it used to be. So when you wrap your kids in cotton wool and you do not let them fail, you are making them weak. They're weaker than they need to be for life, because life's gonna knock them around long after you're gone, and if they don't have the ability and the resilience to cope with failure or problems, or danger, or accidents, then you have done your kids a disservice. So don't protect them, don't overprotect them.

I had a conversation with a school teacher once, Davina, a friend of mine, and she says, you know, we don't teach children to fail upwards, and what she meant by that is, we create an environment where we don't tell kids anymore, well you failed the test you have to do it again. It's everyone gets a certificate for participation, it's just rubbish. We're not teaching our kids to fail well. Because when they fail, they have an opportunity to try again and prove to themselves they've got the ability to improve, to advance, to learn from their mistakes and to do things better, and so from that conversation I was really challenged not to force my kids to fail, but to give them room to find areas in their life where they

couldn't do something, and then help them to learn how to do it. So you don't have to protect your kids all of the time.

#27 on my list is a very interesting one, it says this, should you really pick your children's spouse? Now our kids are of the age of being married, but when I wrote this, they were literally 9 and 11 years old and believe me, at the time I was still considering picking their spouse. Yeah, biblically, we know the story of Abraham, who was worried about his lineage, and particularly Isaac, the promise that God had given him, and he literally sent his servant off to a family location in order to have a wife for Isaac to be selected by the servant, and I'm figuring well, if it's good enough for Abraham, it's good enough for me.

Now you might be concerned, if my son's listening to this, he's concerned I'm shopping on the Internet for a bride for him. But that's not what I'm doing. Abraham sent the servant, but read the story of Abraham servant heading off to find a wife for Isaac. The reference escapes me but it will be in the notes. He, watch what he does, he prays, he prays and that's the key. He prays, Lord, if I would find favour with you, that you would guide me, to find a wife for the son of my master Abraham, and so, leadership requires you as a parent to be praying for your kids.

You should also, I'll add to this, be a guide for them, not a manager. You're not a talent scout, you're not a manager of contracts, you're a guide, and in that you know, how do we guide our children without controlling our children? How do we help them not to make a mistake? So, like I've told my kids, you make a mistake in this area it's a long term mistake that's very, very hard to unravel and so we've got to support them. We can't just sit back and go, Oh well, it'll work out, you'll be able to fix them once you're married. Well, I've never seen that work out. So we've got to be a leader who guides and advises, and I think that's enough for me to say on this subject, but the point I'm making is, the key point I'm making is pray for your kids.

The final one I want to share with you today on my list here says, principle #28, in the book that I have not written, so apologies for that, but this is one that I started off very early on, it says this, connect your kids with your close friends. I made a decision very early on as a parent, I think my kids were about five years old, I made a decision that I wanted my children to be friends with my friends.

Now think about it, a 5 Year old has a limited capacity to be friend with an adult, but they can build a connection at that point, and when Jackson was about five or six years old, me and my mates used to go and play on our dirt bikes. We would take the first Wednesday of the month as a mental health day and we're all self-employed, so we asked the boss and he said yes, and we would put the dirt bikes on a trailer, we head off into the mountains, well, I'd take Jackson with me, and I'd say to my mates, help him, look after him, and just be there for him to talk to, and you know, when he was 5, and when he was 8, when he was 10, that was a little bit different, but you know, when he turned 15, he had a connection with those guys that meant he could relate to them. He could reach out to them if he needed to, and in fact, in one case he started working for one of them when he had his first business.

What's the point there? That the leadership that we provide our children doesn't need to come from just us. It can come from trusted friends that allows for support structures to be put in place, and you know, I had an ulterior motive. I thought to myself, if there's ever a time where one of my kids doesn't want to talk to me, or doesn't trust me, or doesn't even like me, I want to know that there's a trusted adult in the circle that they could turn to.

You know when I was a young man, I was an idiot, and I went through a whole lot of crisis, and I got to the bottom of my hole and I realised I'd dug myself into a grave, and I heard the Lord calling my name, and I didn't feel like I could reach out to my dad, I was too ashamed, but you know what I did? I rang one of his friends. In the old days, you know, we didn't have Internet, so I looked up the phone book. I found his phone number and I rang him and I said, hey, it's Phil Strong, and he goes, oh, g'day and I said, ah can you help me? And he was more willing to help me. Why? Because when I was younger, my dad made sure I was connected in friendship with him in a relevant way, but certainly in a way that helped me out.

What about you?

So let me close as I do, by turning this around and saying, what about you? What does it mean for you to be a leader or an influencer in the lives of young people? Well, whether you're a parent or not, you can still be a leader and an influencer for young people, because trust me, they need them. So I want you think about, what does it mean for you to be a leader? You might not be a pastor. You might not be a parent. You might not be a manager. You might not be an employer. But you can still be a leader.

A leader is one who influences, not necessarily controls. The first thing that you want to make sure you've got is connection. Connection is what counts, and connection happens through time, and time builds trust. So first thing connection, second thing, establish trust.

Trust builds credibility, so how do you build trust? You build trust over time, you build trust in conversations. You build trust through going through hard times together and proving you're not an idiot, you're not a control freak, and you're not going to destroy their confidence by telling people what's happening in their life.

Build trust. When you establish trust, you have a position of credibility, and credibility just means they can lean on you, they trust you, they look up to you, they know that you're dependable, and that credibility, my friends then leads to influence. So A connection, B trust, C credibility, D influence.

Now, influence allows you to help them to shape their pathway. You're not controlling them, you're not managing them. You're being a guide along the journey to help influence their pathway. Why? The final goal is for their profit. You know when Abraham sent his servant up into the northern territories to family to find a wife for Isaac it was for the benefit of Isaac, and the promise of God on Isaac's life.

So why would you want to lead a strong family? Why would you want to have connection with young people that leads to influence, for their profit? For their benefit, for their lives to be richer, more full of purpose, to have less mistakes, although not, no mistakes. Less mistakes, certainly of significant level, and that their lives will be richer because of your influence.

So friends, I'm committed to leading a strong family and if you know me well, you know that family is bigger than blood, and I've talked about that previously, but I really hope that through my stories and my experiences that I've shared with you today, that you can become someone that leads a strong family.

I look forward to spending more time with you, for that to happen I'd love for you to subscribe to the podcast. It's on every channel that you could think of, find it, subscribe to it, make sure it downloads into your application of choice on your smartphone or your device, and make sure that you listen to the messages, and when you bump into me, let's make sure we have coffee together 'cause I'd love that. Hey, well, take care friends, I look forward to catching up with you soon. God bless.