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Introduction

Let's Get Started

- **F**or me (Scott) it was just a typical arrival
- home. Carrie and our five children would
- be there. As soon as I walked through the door my life would get busy as I heard reports about the day, gave out hugs, and reentered family life.

My family had other plans that I was not aware of. In fact, they had been talking for a couple of hours about how they would greet me in a special way to show that they loved me. They were all waiting in anticipation just inside the front door to tell me that I was special.

As I got out of my car I decided to go around the house and enter the back door. My arms were full and it seemed like the easiest way to get all the things where they needed to go. I had no idea I was interrupting my family's plans.

As soon as they saw that I was headed for the backyard, they all ran to get ready at the back door. When I opened the door they yelled, "Surprise!" Watching the shock on my face, they quickly explained that they just wanted to tell me that I am special. They took the things from my hands, gave me a nice cool drink



Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

along with lots of hugs and we enjoyed a special time together.

My family had created a heart moment. Interestingly enough, here it is about fifteen years later and I still remember that special day. I smile as I think about the joy we all shared together.



Heart moments are what parents long for. The fourteen-year-old who cleans up the kitchen just to see the delight on your face. The eight-year-old who cries that repentant cry when he truly realizes the seriousness of his disobedience. The four-year-old who gives you that big hug and says, “You’re the best mommy in the whole world!” All of these are heart moments and they not only remind you of the value of parenting, but also give you the encouragement to continue on.

●  *ne of my (Joanne) most memorable heart moment stories comes from the filming of our first parenting video series. After months of memorizing, training, practicing, and rehearsing, the filming weekend finally came.*

It had been a hectic week traveling to Florida with our two families and then working with the production team and the set creation team. There was so much to manage...and so much to remember! Thursday was quite a day as the anticipation built. Dress rehearsal brought last minute changes from both the director and our drama coach. By Thursday evening I was at the end of my emotional rope. Too little sleep and too many details to think about all at once left me feeling rather frazzled. Add to this the fear that I would forget every line I had worked so hard to memorize.

Just at the point when I could no longer manage my emotions and tears began to fill my eyes, my fifteen-year-old son, Dave, (who had only recently grown so quickly that we could now face each other eye-to-eye) gave me the biggest, strongest hug. Softly he whispered in my ear, "You're gonna be great Mom, just relax. It's gonna be okay."

At that moment I felt all the boyish foolishness melt away and here was a sensitive and thoughtful young man trying to hold his poor mother together.

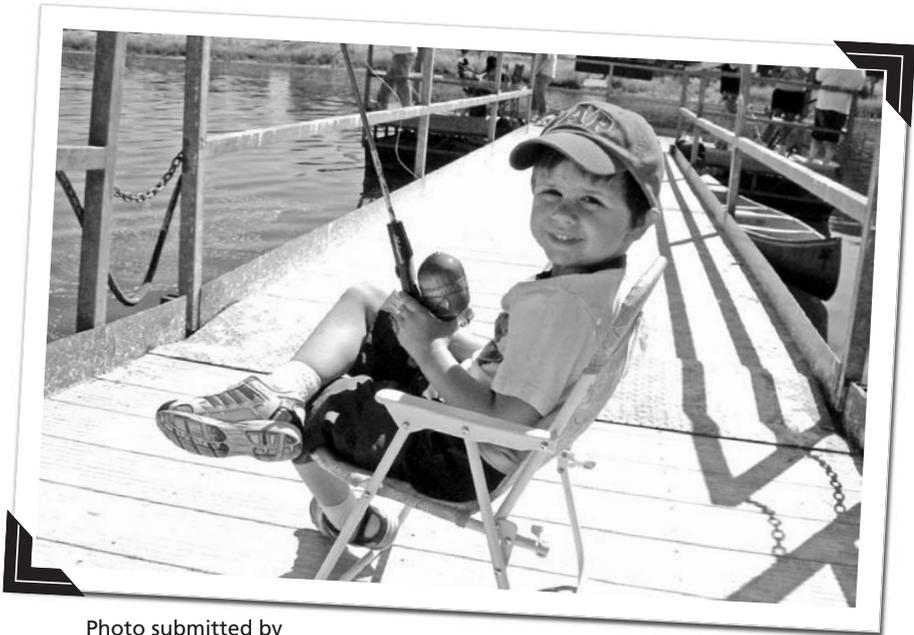


Photo submitted by
Shannon Hinkle, Irving, Texas



Yes, heart moments happen some times when we least expect them. All of a sudden the years of training come together and our kids just blow us away. We see something different in their eyes, and in their hearts. That's what this book is all about.

We've compiled these stories to encourage you and to help you find those heart moments in your family too.

This is a book of true stories. Each one takes place in a real family. Each parent tells the story of a heart moment experienced with a child. These stories may remind you of similar experi-

ences you've had in your own home. Of course, the heart moments that happen in your family are likely to be quite different from the ones you're reading here. After all, each child is unique, each parent is different, and each home is a blend of personalities that provides the catalyst for special heart moments to occur. But reading the stories of others has a way of revealing the important things that parents need to do. From these stories you may receive an inspiration or a desire to persevere that will help you this week with your own children.

All of the stories contained in this book were submitted during the 2007 Heart Moment Contest sponsored by the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Our office staff enjoyed reading the entries, and many a story brought tears to our eyes. Although we couldn't print them all, these were the ones that we believe will best help you find ways to create similar experiences in your own home.

Most parents wish that they would see more heart moments in their children. Likely it's the God-given desire to see your kids excel, do better than you did, or just have many of the benefits of life that you know are out there given the right choices. Don't give up. Heart moments often

come in seasons, requiring perseverance for long periods of time before seeing the desired result.

We hope this book will encourage you and that you'll gain some practical ideas of ways you might relate to your kids differently. The stories may even inspire you as they did us. But most importantly, we want this book to make you more aware of the heart moments that are happening right now in your home. Heart moments do happen, and if parents aren't careful they can miss them, and in so doing, miss great opportunities for growth, closeness, affirmation, or spiritual connectedness.

If you're touched by an illustration, just put the book down for a moment and ask yourself why. Maybe it reminds you of something that happened in your own family or that you wish would happen. You might want to share your thoughts or even the story with your child as an attempt to inspire or encourage. Stories have a way of passing on truth in language that both children and adults appreciate. It's to this end we share these special stories with you.

Chapter 1

Heart Moments that Knock Your Socks Off

Sometimes kids do things that make you so proud of them. In fact, their creativity, graciousness, or compassion so exceeds your own that a twinkle of admiration fills your heart. That's exactly what happened to Paul Vedder from Port Saint Lucie, Florida and he shared this special story with us. (This story won first place in our Heart Moment Contest.)



Photo submitted by
Laura Rizkallah, Painted Post, New York

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• *We have four children. Our oldest son, Paul, was eighteen when we were in the process of adopting Lily from China. The Christmas before was a time when we were saving and pulling all available resources together in order to pay for the adoption. We gathered our children together and gave them the choice of either getting Christmas gifts or trying to go to China as a family to pick up their little sister. They all agreed to forgo Christmas gifts if that gave them a better chance of going on the trip.*

I didn't realize it, but that Christmas morning would certainly prove to be one of the most blessed Christmases of my life. Paul knew that Christmas would not be the same for his two younger brothers and younger sister without some gifts to open. Our video camera was also on its last legs. He had a plan.

My wife and I were awakened exactly in the same manner I had awakened the kids each Christmas morning previously. With his own money Paul had purchased a brand-new video camera.

He woke us up first and then proceeded to his siblings' rooms. He brought us all to the living room where he had placed gifts around what would otherwise have been an empty Christmas tree. My son had not only purchased all of the gifts for each of his brothers and sister, but he also hid them, wrapped them, and placed them under the tree, completely unbeknownst to any of us. My wife and I were absolutely blown away by the unselfishness and love he exhibited to our family, a true gift from his heart.



Teenagers have the ability to show unusual acts of compassion, courage, and ingenuity. Sometimes the work of raising them veils these heroic qualities. When your son or daughter makes an unselfish choice or demonstrates some form of godliness, be sure to take time to notice. Although these acts of kindness are motivated by an internal drive, praise provides an opportunity to draw your heart and your teen's heart just a little closer together.

These kinds of heart moments are a total surprise. Oh sure, you'd like to think that they

come from the years of teaching you've done, or the modeling that's taken place in your own life, but it's obvious that something bigger is happening. Yes, a good foundation can form the basis for great heart moments, but it seems that God is magnifying the opportunity into something much greater than you ever imagined.

What is a heart moment? It's a special connection that takes place inside of your child's heart, or in your own heart or both, that confirms a step of progress. Sometimes the heart moment just reminds you of the significance of your parenting role. Other times the heart moment helps you feel close to your child in a unique and powerful way. For some, a heart moment is when the lightbulb comes on in your child that says, "I finally get it, Dad."

Tears are often associated with heart moments, further revealing the extent of their importance to parents. Usually they bring tears of deep joy, but sometimes it's amazement, admiration, gratefulness, pride, or just the intense satisfaction of feeling close.

When a heart moment overwhelms you with emotion, take a moment and share the blessing. Tell family and friends, but most importantly express what you're feeling to your child. It's in

those times when children can often catch the significance of their choices, that they've made an important decision or action that has deeply touched Mom or Dad.

Sometimes a child comes up with something entirely on his or her own that just grabs you. This happened to Jan Stahl from Ellijay, Georgia, who shared this story.

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ur son Brian is mildly autistic and struggled to learn to speak. A few years after he was speaking and understanding very well, I was tucking him into bed and I said, "Where are you going to put your wife when you get married? You have too many stuffed animals."

He looked up with his thoughtful blue eyes and said, "I don't need a wife, Mom, I have you."

I could have cried, and did when I went to my room.

- ● ●

Sometimes heart moments just happen, but many times they are the result of intentional effort on the part of hard-working parents. You do the daily work of parenting because you know

it's the right thing to do. Along the way you're trying to teach values and life lessons, but most of the time you're just trying to get the things done that have to be done today. Often kids don't appreciate the limits you set, or value your correction, or respond well to your instruction.

Some parents become numb as they go about doing the business of parenting, oblivious to the heart work going on inside the child. Other parents have longed for heart change for months or years and seem to have given up on any significant developments. Then a heart moment comes along to provide encouragement that yes, there is hope that this child may actually grow up someday.

Occasionally you can create heart moments and the results seem to flow out of your well-thought-out plans. However, most heart moments come unexpectedly and surprise you. They are often the result of your teaching, correction, and example, but then a catalyst comes along maybe days or weeks later that brings it all together. They may come while you're driving in the car, getting ready to go out the door, or in those quiet discussions right before bed. You never know when it could happen.

That's why you have to be on the lookout for them all the time.

Josh and Lisa Barrickman from West Chester, Pennsylvania, shared this story with us.

- *A few weeks ago we started doing a*
- *weekly allowance for our almost five-*
- *year-old daughter Ellie to give her a little bit of*
responsibility around the house. She looks
forward to her fifty cents each Friday and
loves to see something on the counter for her to
take to the recycling bin (which is one of her
special jobs).

After the first week I asked her what she had planned for the money she saves, and after a moment of thought she said, "I want to buy a toy for a little kid who doesn't have any toys."

Hearing that response was truly a moment of joy for me as a parent. I gave her a big hug and told her how proud I was. She had a great idea to share what she had with others. It was wonderful to see that at her tender age she already had such a giving, caring heart.



Generosity is one of those qualities that reveal unselfishness. It's an indicator that children are moving out of the me-first stages of life and into a place where they can bless others. Sometimes parents see these acts of kindness in their children, but often they hear reports from teachers, friends, and other leaders.

Parents are thrilled to get reports from other adults about their children's accomplishments, acts of responsibility, and kindness. In fact, if you want to make new friends, take care of their kids and then tell the parents some positive qualities you saw while the children were at your house. It's unfortunate that many parents must be the recipients of bad news about their children, including problems at school or meanness with the neighbors. It's a great encouragement to hear that kids actually do respectable things outside the home.

One of the components of the heart is motivation. Parents spend much of their time using external motivation to build the internal desire to do the right thing. When parents see an internal drive to do what's right without those external motivations, they beam with delight. It's like the child who has trouble learning to ride a bike

without training wheels. When he finally gets it, parents are just as pleased as the child.

Of course as kids get older, take on jobs, or involve themselves in some kind of leadership, parents sit back and say, “That’s my child.” Moms and Dads take great pride when their kids demonstrate some admirable internal qualities. Remember, though, that God is at work in the hearts of your kids. Many times the lessons you taught last week, last month, or last year will return in ways you don’t expect. Always be ready for God to work. After all, that’s the faith journey required of parents. You must continue on day after day, week after week, year after year, trusting God for the results and hoping that your child will eventually catch it.

You can tell that Judy Leslie from New Castle, Pennsylvania, is beaming as she tells this story of her daughter.

● **I** knew many years before she did, that my
● daughter would be God’s servant. Jamie
● said she wanted to work with kids and make a difference in this world, but what she did not know was that she was going to make a difference for eternity in the lives of some of her friends.

God has blessed her with empathy and she can often feel the pain of other people and has a desire to help them. When she was only sixteen years old, she came up with the idea that her friends needed a break from the world and all of its problems that, in many cases, were destroying their lives. Jamie planned a

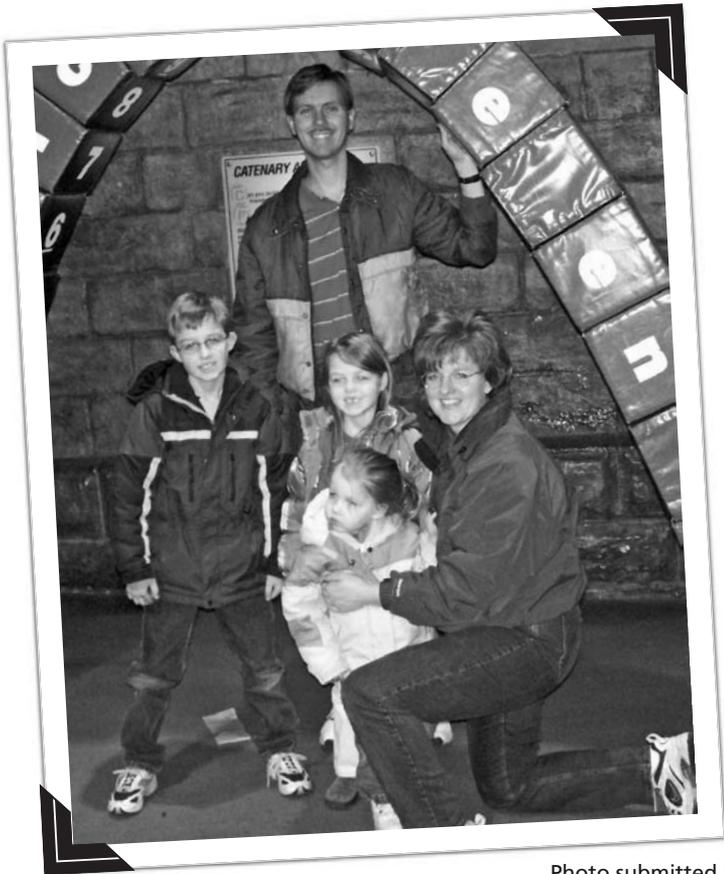


Photo submitted by
Tim and Susan Eckert, Davenport, Iowa

weekend retreat at a camp. She invited a girl with eating problems who had just returned from a hospital stay where Jamie wrote to her weekly. She also invited two girls whose parents were divorcing, another who hated her parents, one who was cutting, and one with a new baby. Jamie typed out permission slips, medical forms, made meal plans, collected money, found drivers, reserved the camp, and even asked adults to go along.

At the time, I thought it was a great idea but believed Jamie was taking on more than she could handle. I was wrong! I asked to “teach” at the retreat. She told me she had taken care of all the “teaching time” and not to worry. I was the adult in charge, but my daughter was making an impact on these kids’ lives. She was prepared, and the kids played trust games, shared scary times, and prayed together. The retreat went so well that she continued it for two more years. I knew the minute Jamie said she could handle it that God was in charge of my daughter’s life. My little girl was now one of God’s servants and she knew it!



All parents wish they had children like Jamie, self-motivated and eager to change the world. But not all kids are the same. Each child, however, has the ability to excel or demonstrate godly qualities. It may be music, encouragement, social skills, or a love for a particular field, but the child takes those interests and abilities to a new level by using them with others.

One of the great things you can do as a parent is to help your children understand their own uniqueness and then develop a vision for making the world a better place. Too many of their peers view their primary job in life as having fun. Anything that gets in the way of having fun should be rejected at all costs.

When a child finally comes to the conclusion that fun is not the ultimate goal in life, things begin to change inside the heart. New values and goals begin to develop. New desires form the basis for decisions. Convictions drive them forward in spite of the obstacles they may face. In short, the heart is developing in some positive ways.

Of course, the greatest heart change happens when children see their God-given uniqueness as a gift from him and seek to weave their talents

and abilities into his plan for their lives. Parents spend a lot of time looking for ways to pass on their faith. It's certainly encouraging when you see your children integrating some of your teaching into their own hearts. It comes out in a prayer, or sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, or in some random act of kindness with a spiritual motivation.

Shannon Tisher is from Aurora, Colorado, and here's her story.

• *W*e moved last summer from a neighborhood filled with kids to one with a lot of elderly neighbors. The move wasn't easy for any of us, but we were eager to make new friends and move forward. Our new neighbor on the right side quickly built a relationship with us, but the other side was a different story. She wouldn't answer her door when we went to meet her, wouldn't say hello when we did, and would walk away when we approached her to start a conversation.

My husband and I prayed for our resistant neighbor, but were at a loss as to how to get to know her. We had never had a neighbor we couldn't get to know. We talked openly in our family about ways to win the neighbors and

make new friends. We shared the successes we had and the challenges we experienced.

One night at bedtime, our ten-year-old daughter showed us a piece of paper labeled “Operation Mean Old Lady.” At first I was surprised by the title because we certainly wouldn’t view our neighbor that way, but as I looked at the rest of the paper I was pleasantly surprised. It was a list of things our daughter wanted to do for our neighbor: shovel her sidewalk, make her cookies, cut flowers from our garden in the spring, and so on. When I asked her about the list, she just said, “You always tell me to love people like Jesus. And if she’s that mean, she really needs to know Jesus!”

Yes! That’s just the attitude we wanted her to have. I was so pleased by my daughter’s insight and willingness to push ahead as we serve the Lord in every area of our lives.



Heart moments happen in those situations because the child somehow goes above and beyond what might be expected for her age or stage of development. No doubt Shannon and her husband taught the kids regularly about the

Lord and told them Bible stories. But when you actually see kids applying the things you've taught, then you know that the truths are sinking in. They are going deep into the heart of your child.

Heart moments do different things inside a parent. Sometimes parents are convicted of their own weaknesses by a child's honest rebuke. Other times you may feel encouraged to grow in your own faith, or work on a particular area of your life because of a child's model. Remember that Jesus is the one who compared spiritual growth to childhood. In Matthew 18:3-4 he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Heart moments provide parents with much-needed perspective. They become reminders of what's important as you stop and enjoy relationship for a few minutes or ponder an offense that needs forgiveness. Parents are often reminded that teaching values is essential and that building good habits of daily spirituality is important.

In fact, sometimes the depth to which children apply spiritual truths is astounding. They can take the concepts much further than you as a parent had considered. Jenni Moreno from Apopka, Florida, tells a touching story of how this very thing happened in her family.

● *L*ast night we had an amazing time at the
● dinner table. Daddy wasn't home yet
● and so we had to eat without him. Judy, age four, said the table was lopsided because Daddy was missing.

"Yes, it's sad to eat without Daddy."

"But Mom, God is always with us, so that means he is sitting in Daddy's chair and we are not alone!"

Then Elizabeth, our seven-year-old, had the idea of a new quiet game. Let's be really quiet and listen to what God says to our minds and hearts. So we were silent. Amazingly, they both were still and concentrated on what they would hear from God.

We then took turns sharing what we heard. Judy said she heard him say, "I love you, my child."

Elizabeth was reminded of him by a special book we have read together for many years

*called **Mama, Do You Love Me?** The best line in the book is the one that God brought to her mind, "I will love you forever and for always, because you are my dear one."*

I shared with them that God reminded me how special my children are and that they are gifts from him to be treasured. God reminded me how honored I am to be their mom and that I need to be the best mommy I can be.

Elizabeth then had the best idea of all. She said, "Mom, stand up and go over to the empty chair with us." So we all stood next to that chair. What happened next was one of the most precious mommy moments I have ever had.

Elizabeth said, "Let's give God a big hug!" We all leaned over and hugged God, and although you might say we hugged a chair, no chair has ever felt so warm, so loving, or so emotion-provoking before in my life. It was truly a magical moment in the midst of an average evening dinner.

After we sat back down to eat, I was at a loss for words. What my girls had just helped me experience was truly a gift. They went on eating and I choked my food down as I tried to hold my emotions together. Elizabeth ended up

switching seats because she wanted to sit in God's lap for dinner.

The innocence of children amazes me, but more than that, their faith astounds me. There was no doubt, no question, no analyzing the situation. God came to dinner that night and they welcomed him with open arms and taught their mom a thing or two in the process. Before I was a mom I knew that I would have a lot to teach my children, but I'm learning more every day how much they have to teach me.



Sometimes kids can do the most profound things that just bless your heart so much. It's in those moments that you just want to sing with praise and thank God for the privilege of watching little people grow up. Enjoy those moments. In some families they come more often than others, but whenever they do come, consider them gifts from God himself meant to encourage you in your role as a parent.

Although parenting may be the toughest job in the world, the little rewards are sweet treasures that you can enjoy forever.