

# BRAVE LITTLE BOYS

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I had an unexpected opportunity to address the subject of bravery at bath time the other night. My 4 year old (who does NOT like water in his eyes) asked to take a shower (while he might not have thought that one through, I saw it as progress); so I made a deal with him (we do deals a lot around here). "If you can put your head completely under the water without whining or complaining about it, tomorrow night you may take a shower." I could see the challenge land in his competitive spirit and begin to wrestle with his fear. *Was there any other way?!* And my brilliant mini negotiator started in on his tactics. And within minutes, his voice had shifted to a slightly higher pitch, bath time was mostly over, and the deed had yet to be done. And then our moment happened.

"Sweetie, look at Mommy in the eyes. You have started whining. That was a deal breaker. God gave Mommy a job, and that is to do my very best to make sure you grow up to be a great and brave man. Real men do not whine, they do not complain. They make a decision, and they do it. Even when it means they have to be brave. So

honey, here's the deal; you may ask Mommy for one more chance, and then you need to do it without whining. You do not have to do this tonight, but you have to make a decision."

After asking politely, without a moment's hesitation he plunged his whole head underwater, grinning through the stream of water pouring down his face down past his eyes as he came up. I was proud. And he knew it.

And this one experience gave me something to think about on the subject of bravery.

**Given the option, most people will make an effort to avoid circumstances that make them uncomfortable. Unless there is proper incentive.** And honestly, I think it's a pretty smart default (run away from large animals with sharp teeth) — unless there is something greater to be gained by pushing through. You're going to throw up at the end of that race — but you could take home a medal. You're going to be exhausted after studying rigorously all semester, but you could land an A and further qualify yourself for grad school. So often, we avoid the difficult out of some degree of fear. **So my big head scratcher lately has been: how do I most effectively raise my boys to value (by default) the things that are worth pushing through the pain to take hold of?!** How do I instill a spirit of bravery? Because our world needs brave men.

**Here's what I do know: character emulates. It takes after what it ultimately values.**

If one values truth, they will push past the painful circumstances to uphold it, revere it, protect it. So, if I want my boys to be brave, to be protectors of truth, to uphold strength, love and perseverance; I must go beyond underscoring the value, and offer them an example to emulate. And while I believe that Brandon and I are critical pieces to the puzzle, (and it offers tremendous incentive to work on our own hearts) we're just not enough on our own.

*"You can talk about right and wrong and good and bad all day long, but ultimately people need to see it. Seeing and studying the actual lives of people is simply the best way to communicate ideas about how to behave and how not to behave...young men especially need role models. If we can't point to anyone in history or in our culture whom they should emulate, then they will emulate whomever." — Eric Metaxas, 7 Men*

My friend is homeschooling her very young boys, and something she has incorporated into her curriculum is a monthly (sometimes more frequent) study on a great leader. She focusses on characteristics that made them stand out, like bravery, selflessness, and honesty (to name a few). I am deeply impressed. They have a number of characteristics from *real people* they are incentivized to emulate.

**I think so often most of us can land on and even agree regarding characteristics that are deeply admirable.** Bravery is one of them. Honesty is another. We breathe relief at compassion and are satisfied with justice. And I think it's part of God's gift to us — that he wired us in such a way that those things that already define his character are already attractive to us. He beckons us so thoroughly... And ultimately, I am so glad that He will be around even when we are not, driving home the little truths to my children that we spent time introducing to them while we had the privilege of having them in our home. And that's just another thing I love about being a Christian parent — I am not alone in this. I am not the final voice of truth in their lives. His voice is forever, it is eternal. He is more than capable of beckoning bravery.