

# The Pillars of **Powerful Parenting**

“Guess What YOUR TEEN Told Me Today?”



**Dr. Davis McAlister**

Foreword by Jay Maymi, (Talk Show Host)

## The Pillars of Powerful Parenting

“Guess What Your Teen Told Me Today”

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The Pillars of Powerful Parenting “Guess What  
Your Teen Told Me Today” by Dr. Davis  
McAlister

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*First of all, Thank you to God for guiding me on this journey and providing me the opportunity to share what I have learned*

*I would like to dedicate this book to my wife and children for their ongoing support and their willingness to continue to grow and learn.*

*Thank you to all the students over the years that trusted me as their teacher and mentor*

*Thank you to all the parents that entrusted their teenagers in my care and instruction*

*Thank you to Marc Feinberg for his guidance on helping me finish this book and getting it into your hands*

*Thank you to Paula and Jerry for your unconditional love*

*Lastly, thank you to my parents for giving me the reference point for parenting*



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**If I had my child to raise over again**

I'd build self-esteem first and the house later

I'd finger paint more and point the finger less

I would do less correcting and more connecting

I'd take my eyes off my watch and watch with my eyes

I would care to know less and know to care more

I'd take more hikes and fly more kites

I'd stop playing serious and seriously play

I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars

I'd do more hugging and less tugging

I'd see the oak tree in the acorn more often

I would be firm less often and affirm much more

I'd model less about the love of power

And more about the power of love.

**Diane Loomans<sup>1</sup>**

## Foreword

In my line of work, I meet a lot of people. A lot of people all the time. Yet, it has been one of the greatest joys of my life to do so. Simply because of the quality of individuals I have an opportunity to meet who pour into my own life the goodness of what they do, what they stand for, and how they live. This is why within a few minutes of initially meeting and speaking with Dr. McAlister, I knew that I had met someone who stood for good things. After getting to know him better, I can say that I wasn't wrong. There is a sincerity, honesty, and genuineness about his nature and character that I continue to be impressed by. All-important traits that many today are in short supply of. That's why when he asked me to write the foreword to this book I was immediately honored to have been asked. His book is written with the same style, consistency and undertone of his nature and character and that's what makes it such an impactful and effective writing.

There are books written that their authenticity and genuineness are immediately recognized by the reader. Dr. McAlister has written such a book. The depth of knowledge and wisdom displayed by the author is accredited within the first few chapters. In this book, the reader will not second-guess that the stories, lessons, and action steps shared are coming from a rich resume full of life



experiences as a teacher, coach, husband, and most appropriately as a parent. This book promises to reshape and revamp the way that we may have handled some of our own common parenting challenges, life issues, and relationships. It truly forces you to re-evaluate our approaches towards our children, spouses, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and even acquaintances. The way that he has thoughtfully applied his 10 Pillars with supportive Scripture, quotes, and most of all his own life experiences left me amazed that this is his first book. Although, I suspect (actually predict) that there will be others.

Another aspect that I enjoyed about this book is that anyone can relate to the story that he weaves throughout the book as he shares teachings with his student. The interaction that he shares is one that any parent, teacher, and student can appreciate and learn from. I kept thinking about my own children and possibly if they would have ever needed to share their struggles with another adult and what kind of advice or guidance might they have received. It raised my own awareness to my parenting and how I can become a more affectionate, communicative, and supportive parent, spouse, and even friend. You will undoubtedly come to value how he doesn't leave the reader hanging with the outcome details of his conversations with his student. The fullness of the lesson is in full display in every chapter and every

pillar. This is a book that I would have my children read and even make family discussions out of it, if they chose to. Or, let "Doc" be the additional voice of reason, acumen, and straight forward common sense. Lastly, and probably most notable for me was Dr. McAlister's humility in recognizing his own mistakes and faults in parenting. He doesn't take a holier than thou approach and there is not a sliver of being pretentious in his demeanor. It was a refreshing approach and one that the reader will find extremely appealing.

I encourage every parent, parent to be, teacher, coach, religious leader and even teenager and young adult to read this book. As it has done for me, it will leave you all the better for having done so.

Jay Maymi  
Husband, Father, CEO, Awarded 9X Author,  
Radio Talk Show Host,  
Keynote Speaker, Renown Sales Psychologist



## Preface

One of the questions I expect to hear the most is why I decided to write this book. This book took nine years to write and spanned the time of some of my experience as a high school teacher and coach. This period also included the majority of my time as a parent to children that ranged from our oldest child that was high school aged and about to graduate (when I started writing this) to my youngest child now entering high school (when I finished).

During that time, I have lost count of the number of students that would seek me out for advice or ask me questions in class that related to life, love, and success. Some of the experiences and questions challenged me to think about my parenting. It also put me in a position that if my child was the one asking the question, how would I want the response to be? What advice would I expect my child to receive if they asked the same question?

I would also like to say that I drew from my own childhood. Things were not perfect, far from it. My parents did the best they could with what they had and what they knew. I learned some things that were right and some things that I vowed to do better for my own children. I made a mental note of the things that I wish I'd known along the way that might have changed the course of my life for the better.

While this book centers around a main character, there are others that are introduced that represent the culmination of some of the most difficult questions I was asked over the years and the responses that I gave. I want parents to read this and have an idea of what kind of questions their children ask to those that they may look up to the most. I want teachers to read this and gain some insight on how a parent would want their child mentored. I want church leaders to read this and be able to reach out to parents and children to provide them the help they may need through some of these difficult topics. I want people to reach out to me for help in teaching these concepts to a variety of groups.

I want to illustrate a picture of what a positive influence could be based on the advice I would want my children to receive if they asked the same question. There have been times throughout the course of my children growing up that my wife and I needed that positive outside influential voice when times were tough. Unfortunately, the majority of the time, it was not there.

I want to say that I fully understand that I am not perfect. My answers may not be perfect. My parenting has been far from perfect. My hope is that my mistakes and the things I (we) got right will not be in vain. My hope is that I can bring a different way to see what I see, and if I can positively impact one more parent or student

through this book, I can rest easy that I have served my purpose.

I want to say thank you to my wife and my children for their ongoing love, support, and lessons that you have taught me over the years. Please forgive me of the times I was wrong and remember me for the times I was right!

Dr. Davis McAlister



## **Pillar 1**

### **Unconditional Love**

Does your child love you or hate you?

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:18,19 (KJV)*

The bell rang and my students waited for my acknowledgement to let them gather their things to leave. They hurriedly make their way to the door headed to the next class. Most of them passing on their way out gave the usual “Have a nice day, Dr. McAlister” or “See ya’ later Doc”.

I always have a couple that stay behind for a few minutes to ask questions. Typically, I get asked when the next test will be given (to which I point at the board heading “Important Dates”) or when would be a good time to come to tutoring (as I point to my tutorial times listed on the board). This day was different. The questions were anything but typical, but so was my lesson that day.

I decided to deviate away from my scheduled lesson plan that day although in my mind it could be considered right on track. We had been going



over a lesson on Communication skills as it pertained to importance in the healthcare field. I know, blah, blah, blah. Anyone who has had to call a doctor's office to schedule an appointment is confronted with nothing that resembles proper communication, much less courtesy. I'm a teacher so I can change the entire dynamic of a career profession, right?

You can say that I was freelancing, speaking from my heart, being used as a voice for God. There are several ways that this can symbolized, but basically, I wanted to see if I could get my students' attentions. I talked about the importance of talking to their parents. It's at this point that I get the image of a woman from a black and white horror movie screaming.

I asked a simple question and was amazed at the response. I asked them to raise their hands if they had told their parent(s) that they loved them in the past year. I was so intrigued by the first class I asked that I made a point to ask each class that day. Now, my average class size is between 30-35 for 6 periods a day. In every class period, I would only have one to three students raise their hands. That meant that less than 10% of my students had verbally expressed their love for their parents in THE PAST YEAR!

I couldn't believe it. I was floored. I couldn't imagine not hearing that trademark "I love you!" from my children at least once a day, much less in over a year. To me, that's like not getting air or homemade banana pudding at Thanksgiving! It just doesn't happen!

Back to the end of class. This day I had a student that wanted to schedule time to speak with me about the "lesson" from that day. Immediately my mind starts racing about whether I had made the right decision to deviate from my lesson plan.

I schedule a time to allow her to ask questions and send her on her way (of course with a pass to class because now she is going to be late).

\* \* \* \* \*

The young lady, "Stacy", is on time for her appointment to ask her questions about my lesson. I could tell that she was very nervous and seemed somewhat uncomfortable. I just simply told her to pull up a desk next to mine and asked her what questions she had for me.

Stacy began to express how the question about the last time she expressed love to her parents really caught her attention. She said that she

honestly could not remember when the last time she said it to them. Stacy said that the mere thought of it hurt.

I asked,” Would you say that your relationship with your parents is good?”

Stacy said,” Actually, I don’t feel like I really have one. My mom and I fight all the time and my dad works a lot so I don’t really talk to him.”

“Ok, when was the last time that you remember things were good between you and them?”

Stacy then talked about how she used to love to sit in her Daddy’s lap and how he used to hold her. She used to go shopping with her mom and they had fun looking at clothes. She still couldn’t remember how long ago that had been.

I sat at my desk with my hands in my lap, leaning forward to listen to my student as she poured her heart out. Her tears were flowing as she emotionally unloaded what seemed to be years of frustration. Frustration that seems to come from both sides as a result of her getting older.

My next question seemed to strike a nerve.  
“How much of that do you think is your fault?”

“What do you mean my fault? It’s not my fault, they are just too busy for me!”

I raised my hands and said,” Wait, wait, wait. Let’s think about this for a minute. Have you ever gotten an attitude with your parents?”

“Well, yes. But…”

“Nah, ah, ah… no buts. Let’s think about this for a minute. If someone gets an attitude with you, how do you react?”

Stacy thought for a minute, then her eyes dropped to the floor. “I get defensive.”

I said,” Exactly. So, if your parents are as busy as you say they are and the only time they have any communication with you is perceived as negative because you either want something or there is some sort of upheaval, how are they going to tend to react when they get around you?”

She continued to look at the floor and quietly replied,” Bad.”

I just let that sink in for a few quiet and intentionally uncomfortable seconds. Stacy started to squirm in her seat a little as I stared at her. She finally broke the silence and asked,” So, is it all my fault?”

“Absolutely not. Your parents have to be savvy enough to see the pattern, but the problem is that most parents are too busy to notice, much less take the time to try and fix it.”

Stacy sat thinking. “So, what can I do about that? I’m just a kid.”

I laughed a little and simply replied, “Did you influence it to go bad?”

“Yes.”

“So, why wouldn’t you be able to influence it to go good?”

She said, “I guess I can, but how?”

First, I told her that she has to start telling them that she loves them every morning and every evening before she goes to bed. This also included anytime she talked to them on the phone.

She asked, “What if they don’t say it back?”

“It doesn’t matter. You say it with the idea that it’s just something you want them to know. Be consistent and see what happens. Give it one week, we’ll meet again at this same time next week for you to give me a report.”

She had doubt in her eyes, but she still gave me a nod with a tentative, "Ok, I'll do it."

What she did not realize is that I was putting the responsibility firmly in her grasp to mend the relationship. I was putting her in the position to lead by example to influence the entire family dynamic that somehow lost its way.

Like most parents, hers had ventured onto the yellow-brick road of life and were now consumed by everyday cares and concerns regarding finances, bills, personal issues, etc. I see so many parents that believe that once their child hits puberty, they no longer need their attention.

They just assume everything is going to be OK. Then, the issues start to rear their ugly heads and every encounter with their teenager is now a negative one.

From what I have observed over the years, "I love you" is the first to be cast to the wayside. They just become extra words in an already busy day. A parent will just assume that it is implied since they are the parent. It's funny though how if a spouse does not hear those words, it can cause a riff. Why would it be any different in a parent-child relationship?

It only makes sense to me that you doubt and dissociate what you do not hear regularly. Any relationship is like a high-performance vehicle. You are only going to get the best out of that vehicle if you give it the best care and maintain it. Once you neglect it, it will fall apart.

\* \* \* \* \*

One week later...

“So, how did the plan go?”

“I can’t believe it. The first couple of days, they would just be quiet when I said that I loved them. I started to doubt you but by the third day, they started to say it back. Even my little sister joined in on it!”

I was excited for her. “That’s great! How do you feel about your ability to influence your family now?”

She smiled and looked at the floor. “You were right, I can influence things to go good.”

“Man, it just stinks to be right...” We both laughed and she rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah... you were right. Ok, now, Doctor Smarty-pants, what do I do next?”

At this point, I’m feeling pretty good about my decision to change my lecture plans the week before, but now, it was time to be systematic in my approach. I had to find out which relationship was hurting the most. This would give me an idea of the next necessary step to helping this determined young lady.

There were two conflicting scenarios that I had to consider. Do I give her the approach of attacking the worst relationship first and then the lesser? Do I have her work on the lesser problem in hope that they can work on the third together? What will work best for her?

“Who do feel like you are furthest from in your relationship?”

Stacy didn’t hesitate to answer, “My Daddy!”

At this point, I’m thinking like a father. I believe that Daddy-daughter relationships are so crucial. That relationship can dictate a young girl’s decisions about men and potential mates for the rest of her life. I have seen so many young women make horrible relationship choices based on the fact that either they had a bad relationship with their father or did not have one at all for one



reason or another. There also seems to be no shortage of young (or old) men out there just waiting to manipulate and take advantage of a girl with serious Daddy issues.

I have personally witnessed two sisters make life-destroying decisions as a result of their father passing away at an early age. They witnessed their mother have a nervous breakdown and completely shut down emotionally after her husband passed. The oldest daughter developed a reputation for getting drunk and sleeping with random guys at parties. As a result, she now has a baby and has no idea who the father is. The younger sister left home to move in with her boyfriend's parents at the age of 16 because his home is more stable.

At this point, the decision is clear. She needs to fix things with Daddy.

“Ok, Stacy, what do you miss most about your Dad?”

She thought for a couple of minutes. “I don't know where to start.”

“You told me last week that you missed just sitting in his lap and him holding you. Why not start there?”

“I'm too big for that now,” she laughed.

“You are 5 feet tall on a good day and no bigger than an idea. You’re never too big to sit in your Daddy’s lap. When you go home tonight, just go sit in his lap and hold onto him. He’ll look at you like you have lost your mind but don’t give up. Do it every night for the next week and I’m going to add one thing... tell him you want a Daddy-daughter date night this weekend. You plan out the whole night, even offer to pay. Just tell him you want to spend some time with him.”

“Do you really think that will work? He’s going to think I’m crazy.”

“I firmly believe that you cannot hit a ball if you don’t swing. Let him think you are crazy. He’ll be concerned and pay more attention to you. Hahaha!”

“That’s true!”

\* \* \* \* \*

A couple of days later, on Friday, Stacy was not at school. I couldn’t help but wonder why. She seemed to be in good health and spirits all week. I couldn’t help but wonder how she was doing over the weekend.

On Monday, she came into class with a big grin on her face and a couple of cups of a certain Seattle-based coffee favorite of mine. She handed me one of them.

I said, "Thank you, but what is this for?"

"To say thank you for what you have done. My Daddy and I went out to eat and to a movie. Then we went somewhere else and had dessert. It was the best time we have had together since I don't know when."

I was excited for her and for my cup of java goodness. "I'm glad everything went so well. So, what do you think is the next step?"

She laughed, "That's easy because my Mom saw how much fun we had, I have a fun night scheduled with her this coming weekend and she is making my Dad take her out on a date night, too."

"Wow, that really is awesome! I'm glad that it has taken off for you so well! Now, you all have to continue to work on the relationship and maintain it. Don't compromise on it!"

"I'm not going to let it go back to the way it was. I didn't like it and I don't want to go back there again."

I smiled and said, “I don’t blame you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This is where I turn my conversation to you as the reader. You have to understand that even children of the worst parents in the world still love them. Children truly understand unconditional love. The question, you have to ask, is do you?

What kind of example did you have growing up that you are now carrying into parenthood as it pertains to showing your children love?

The scripture that best explains unconditional love comes out of 1Corinthians Chapter 1. If we begin at verses 4-8, “Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (NIV)

That is a complete definition. Love has also been called blind. I know that we can think back to those early relationship days and remember how wonderful everything was. We didn’t need food, water, or air because we could just live on love!

I also remember breaking up with that person because as the love goggles began to clear up, nasty things called faults started to appear. Soon, the faults outweighed the love perception and we fell out of love. This makes my point very clear; children don't see our faults.

Now, as they get older, our faults will start to show, but true unconditional love covers those faults like the blood of Jesus covers our sins. They love us in spite of our faults.

We have to see them as they see us, and most importantly, how God sees us. I love the line in verse 5 that says, "it keeps no record of wrongs". You should not be keeping score of your children's transgressions, nor would you want them to keep a score of yours.

Oscar Wilde has even been quoted as saying, "Children begin by loving their parents."

Why would we ever want to lose something that is given to us from the very beginning?

You didn't have to earn it. There was no trial period, no strings attached, no conditions. It was just given... That is so powerful. It is so powerful that the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians in verse 13, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (NIV)