

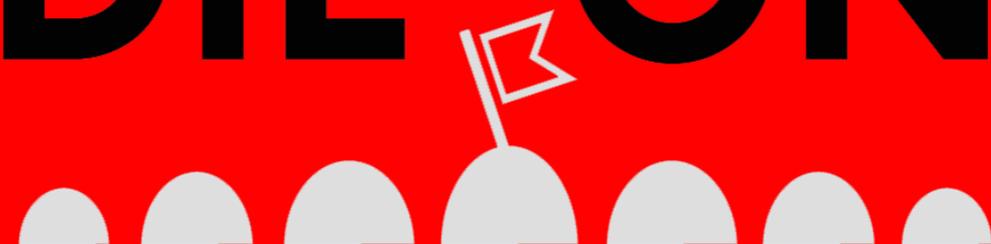
SEVEN HILLS

EVERY

PARENT

— **SHOULD** —

DIE ON



MIKE BERRY

7 Hills Every Parent Should Die On.

by Mike Berry

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This Parenting Thing Is....Well....

I'm just going to say it: *parenting is hard!* But you already knew that! If you've been a parent for any length of time, you're nodding as you read this. I've discovered that parenthood is one of only a few things that can fill my heart with the utmost happiness or leave me feeling totally lost and broken.

It's hard. And if you're anything like us, you get caught up in what I like to call, the "*If I could just's*" of life.

We say to ourselves, "If I could just make it through this difficult season" or "If I could just make it through that overwhelming project," I'll find peace. "If I could just get my child through the elementary years," or "If I could just get my kid through their teenage years," or "If I could just find a personal routine, or make more money, or get more vacation time, or start feeling better," life would be perfect.

We become so fixated on the "*If I could just's*" that we lose sight of the "*already haves.*"

You and I have already come so far in life, and in our parenting. Instead of focusing on how far you still have to go, look behind you and marvel at how far you've already come! The fact that you're reading a book on parenting means you haven't given up yet. If you had, you would be doing something else with your time, right? You're not dead, you're still alive. And, you're going to get there. In fact, it's time to get going!

Why “7” And Why “Hills?”

Honestly, there are so many things I could include in this book that would far outnumber 7. As you read through, you will probably come up with several more “hills” that are just as important as the hills I’ve listed. I believe the 7 in this book are the big ones. They tend to function much like an umbrella. If you commit yourself to dying on them (in other words, they become unmovable and irreplaceable in your parenting), everything else tends to follow suit.

I use the word “hill” for one simple reason: *A cause you believe in should be a hill you will die on.* Just like the soldiers in WWII ascended jagged cliffs and overtook the German forces in Normandy because they believed in a cause, we must ascend some jagged cliffs in the battle for the hearts of our children.

I’m pretty sure that anyone reading this, who’s a parent, believes in the cause of raising their children right, and doing everything in their power to be the best parent they can be.

After all, no one holds their brand new baby, or looks into their newly adopted daughter’s sweet, innocent eyes, and thinks, “I really hope I screw this kid up some day!”

If so....another topic for another book...

But the reality is, so many people enter parenthood with their eyes wide shut. You read that right- *eyes wide shut*.

They're unprepared (who isn't though, right?), unaware, and frankly overwhelmed. That's all pretty normal. Every new parent goes through this. Unfortunately, many remain in this state, even years into parenthood. They have this distorted belief that everything is going to somehow fall into place, or that someone else will fix their kid's issues, or magically their children will make wise choices on their own.

It's a dangerous approach if you ask me. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing magically works on it's own. That is especially true in parenting. You have to be intentional. You have to parent on purpose. If you don't willingly engage in the fight for your family's heart, you will lose their heart to the world.

Keep your eyes wide open. Be vigilant. Be intentional. Parent on purpose. It's not an overnight fix. You have to stay committed. But if you do, you may just see the results you're hoping for. Not immediately. Not overnight. Not even after a month or two. But at some point, you will.

Consistent parenting mixed with intentionality and purpose, over a long period of time, produces the results you are looking for.

I'm pretty sure that right about now you're wondering how in the world you start? That's a great question....keep reading!

The Starting Line.

You have to begin somewhere.

Either you're a new parent just beginning, and that is your starting line, or you have been a parent for years and you need to find a new starting line.

In this world it's easy to lose sight of the most important things when it comes to parenting. I don't know if you can identify or not, but the busier I become, the harder it is for me to keep the critical components of parenting in front of me. Especially in a world that's moving at the speed of light!

The best starting line I know of begins with *commitment*.

I'm not talking about *commitment* as it relates to showing up to your kid's activities, spending time with them, or involvement in their lives. Those are all really important but I'm talking about something different.

It's a ***commitment to principles***. Unchanging values that never leave your sight and will not be compromised for anything. Thus, *the 7 hills every parent should die on*. You. Me. All of us who have children!

In 12 years of parenting, I've blown this big time. Trust me! But, here's what I've discovered: I achieve positive traction in my parenting, and in my life, when I willingly die on these 7 hills. They're that important!

So, here we go...

The Hill of Influence.

There is no greater voice of influence in a child's life than his or her parent. Did you know that? This means that you and I possess the greatest amount of influence spiritually, emotionally, and socially for our children. It may be hard to see (because it appears like your child listens to *nothing* you say) but it's true. They are watching us, studying us, and taking life cues from us. It's a heavy responsibility.

While you are the greatest voice of influence in your child's life, you're not their *only* voice of influence. Let me repeat this: *while you're the greatest voice of influence in your child's life, you won't be the only voice of influence.* There will be a season when you drop from the primary voice to lower in rank. I call it *the 4th place of influence.*

When your child is between the ages of birth and 10-12 years old, you are their world. They listen to everything you say. They want to be with you nearly every single moment of every single day. If you're going to the grocery store, they want to go. If you have to mow the lawn, they will walk beside you. When you arrive home from work, they drop what they're doing and run into your arms (It's a great feeling, isn't it?).

Beyond all of this, they listen to you. *Every. Single. Word!* (unless you ask them to clean their room).

If you tell them you hung the moon, they believe you. If you explain an ideal or value to them they hold it to be true (I still hold values I learned from my parents growing up).

If you rank the voices of influence in their lives, from birth to age 10, 11, or 12, it might look something like this:

- 1. You. (parent)**
- 2. Other adults. (coaches, small group leaders, teachers)**
- 3. Friends.**
- 4. Culture.**

But then, there's a shift. That's right, a *shift*. Right around 10-12 years old (the pre-teen years) things start to change. They slowly stop running to your arms when you walk in the door from a hard day's work. It seems as if they are no longer listening to you, or paying attention to you. Suddenly, the ranking shifts and begins to look a little more like this:

- 1. Friends.**
- 2. Culture.**
- 3. Other adults.**
- 4. You.**

This is pretty much the way the rankings stay all the way until age 19 or even into their early 20's. It can be disheartening. It can feel like the end. Honestly, this is when most parents give up, throw their hands up, and concede defeat, feeling as though they've lost their child and they can never regain that #1 spot.

But here's the truth: *you're still on the list!* Do you realize this? You may not be ranked number 1, but you're still there, still maintaining a voice of influence, even if it's not the primary one.

This is the season when you must stay steady-as-she-goes. You must commit yourself to consistency. You must be there, alongside of your child, loving them, nurturing them, listening to them. Don't give up on this hill when your rankings drop for a season. Stay the course.

You're right if you feel like you can't regain the number 1 ranking during these years. If you fight for it, they will only resist. In fact, it's a bad idea to fight for number 1. Give your kid some space during these years. They are discovering the great big world around them.

This is no way means that you should not set clear boundaries during the teenage years. In fact, it means you should more than ever. Just don't suffocate your child. It's easy to give up and concede defeat, disengage, or become helicopter parents who hover over every part of their life during these years. I understand that. I've even been there.

Commit yourself to staying the course, dying on this hill at any cost, and pouring into your kid even when it seems like it's going nowhere.

There's a payoff if you do. There will be a day when you and your child will become friends. Real friends. The reason I know this is because I get to witness it every single day. My wife's parents committed to dying on this hill and they stayed the course through her teenage years. And she was *not* an easy kid to raise. Now, she considers her mom and dad to be close friends of hers. It's incredible to watch.

If you commit to dying on the Hill Of Influence, that could be your outcome (someday). But, it takes a lot of time and a lot of persistence.

The Hill of Boundaries.

If you and I want to successfully guide our children to become productive, responsible adults, we must live (and parent) by boundaries. These are healthy guidelines and rules that we set up to ensure the health and well-being of our kids. [For a great resources on setting boundaries with children click [here](#).]

Boundaries define the limits but they should also keep our children at a distance from danger or bad choices. Look at them like guardrails along the roads you travel. There is a specific route I take to my office, nearly every day, where I pass a large lake. There's about 75 feet from the edge of the road to the edge of the water. There is also a very steep and jagged drop off at water's edge. The guardrail is about 10 feet of the road, leaving at least 65 feet until the drop off into the water.

That's a good thing. If the guardrail were 65 feet from the road and only 10 feet from the drop off into the water, it would be a little too close to danger (or annihilation, depending on how you see it).

We must view the boundaries we set up for our children in the same light. Healthy boundaries, much like guardrails, are no good if they're built up *against* the danger zone. They must be built at a distance *from* the danger zone.

An example would be this: if you're waiting until your son is actively surfing pornography online to move your family's computer out into the family room, in plain sight, set time limits, and install filters, your son has already crossed over into the danger zone. A healthy boundary when it comes to internet use would be to set up time limits, install filters, and place the computer in the middle of the living room *before* you grant any kind of internet access.

Boundaries are not easy to establish, nor maintain. It takes work. It requires consistency and diligence. And, it hinges on a no-compromise approach to raising your children.

Boundaries are also not a “one-and-done” thing. The boundaries you set for your elementary-aged children will not be effective when they are pre-teens. Likewise, your 16 or 17 year old will need updated boundaries because the boundaries you created when they were 12 or 13 are out-of-date.

As your child grows, so must the boundaries you establish for them. The other thing to keep in mind is that you may end up creating boundaries that you never saw coming when they were younger. I know many people who’s children were compliant, respectful and (for the most part) obedient when they were little, but ended up making poor choices that called for interesting or unforeseen boundaries to be created when they were teenagers.

Not saying this will happen, and I certainly hope it doesn't for you, but it is a reality.

As a parent, ask yourself these questions as you establish healthy boundaries for your children:

- 1. Do our boundaries reflect our values as a family?**
- 2. Do our boundaries allow for discussion or flexibility as our children grow?**
- 3. Do our boundaries point our children toward personal growth?**
- 4. As my children grow are the boundaries growing along with them?**

The Hill of Discipline.

Following suit with boundaries is the hill of discipline. The bottom line is this: when the boundaries you and I set up for our children are crossed (and they will be crossed), discipline is the crucial next step! Discipline redirects and charts new courses. When applied correctly, it can be a powerful tool in bringing necessary change to our children.

Here are a few keys to healthy discipline:

1. **Make sure the punishment fits the crime.** Nothing erodes your relationship with your children quicker than grounding them for 2 months because they fed the dog an hour later than they were supposed to. However, if you have asked and asked and asked that they pick up their dirty laundry and they continue to disregard your instructions, perhaps a strict consequence is fitting.
2. **Be timely.** If you are not ready with an immediate consequence for a crossed boundary, your kid will stop believing you, or lack respect for your boundaries, knowing they can push them whenever they want.
3. **Be specific.** This is the second cousin to making sure the punishment fits the crime. Make sure you are creating specific consequences that relate directly to the boundary that was crossed. And make sure you never heap on extra consequences for past mistakes. That's demoralizing.
4. **Be detailed.** You can bet that if your consequence is vague or given in haste, your child will wind up confused and frustrated.

The Hill of Example.

The greatest lie we could ever believe as parents is that our children aren't really paying attention to us. It's easy to buy into this when they are teenagers, especially.

The greatest lie we could deliver to our children is, "Do as I say, not as I do." I really can't believe anyone says this anymore, but they do. I recently heard a father say it to his son in a grocery store. Truth is, we are the greatest life example our children will ever see. They will *follow* our example. If we live by character and integrity they will too. If we choose not to, they will too. It's that simple.

Have you ever heard your children say something they heard you say, or imitate you in some fashion and it made you cringe a little? We have on more than a few occasions.

I remember a few years ago, hearing my daughter, in another room in our house, putting her dolls in timeout as a "consequence for bad behavior."

She sounded just like us. I began to realize just how closely she was watching and listening to us.

Our children follow our example. Even when we think they're not paying any attention, they are. And when we least expect it, we will see the same good traits, or bad traits, that we display, manifested in our children's actions.

Pay close attention to the example you are setting for your children. They will carry what they learn from you into their adult lives. Just as important as the Hill Of Influence, the Hill of Example is a major hill to die on and commit yourself to because it actively shapes what our future children will hold as values.

Recently, I wrote a post on my [blog](#), that centered around valuable lessons I wanted my sons to learn, and I talked about the importance of modeling appropriate behavior in front of them.

What I've discovered, especially as the father of boys, is that I must be their first and foremost example of integrity, character, and respect. The world will not teach these character traits to them. In fact, it will do just the opposite. It will teach them self-centeredness, self-indulgence, and a lack of respect. That's just the world we live in.

Personally, I've got work to do in this area. I'm sure you can agree with that last sentence. We're human and we live in a fallen world. There are so many days where my attitude, or actions, are not what I would consider to be model. That's the beauty of grace though. My children are pretty good at extended it. Therefore, it's not something I can take for granted.

They're watching me. Studying me. And someday, what they saw in me, growing up, will play out in the way they parent and interact with the world.

The Hill of Financial Responsibility.

This is a major hill. One of the leading causes of financial mismanagement amongst young adults is the example they had growing up as a child.

Our children will learn how to handle money by watching the ways we handle money. If we are financially irresponsible, they will be financially irresponsible. You can count on it! On the contrary, if we handle money responsibly they will too! And by making this a hill you die on, you greatly reduce the chances of them returning home, after college, to live in your basement! :-)

Take a moment to evaluate the way you handle money. Ask yourself some crucial questions. For instance, what kind of example are you setting for your children? Are you teaching them to save before they spend? Or do they have a first-hand look into over-spending?

How much debt have you racked up? Is it consuming you? Are you actively working to pay it off and do your children know this? When they ask you questions about bills and mortgages how do you answer them?

Are they witnessing you in a state of panic over your finances? This does more damage to their self-esteem and confidence than you can imagine.

We'll get into this with the next Hill, but, how's your generosity? Are you a giver or more of a taker?

Your family tree will grow based on the way you cared for it, or didn't care for it. If you are wise with your money and invest in your future, and your children see this modeled everyday, your tree will fork (as Dave Ramsey always says!).

The Hill of Generosity.

Our children study us closer than we think. They watch the way we treat the world around us. And they carefully examine, and tuck away in their hearts, how giving we are to those in need.

I learned this powerful truth several years ago when I made the choice to give something valuable away. My wife and I had begun volunteering at an inner-city church in Indianapolis led by an extremely gifted and loving pastor. To this day, one of the nicest, most genuine men I have ever met!

At the same time my MacBook Pro stopped working. To make a long story short, after several trips to the Apple store to have it worked on, Apple decided to replace my aging machine with a brand new MacBook Pro. I was elated. But then I discovered the church where I was employed had decided to provide a MacBook Pro for me to use as part of my job.

We didn't need two expensive computers. So after some thought, and prayer, my wife and I decided to give the extra computer away. We knew God was telling us to give it to the pastor in Indianapolis.

I started to grow more and more excited as the day I was going to meet the pastor approached. I asked him to meet me for coffee so I could present the gift to him. At the last minute, my daughter, who was 9 years old at the time, asked to come along. I had no idea how crucial my decision to bring her along would be.

As I tearfully presented the laptop and case to the pastor, I was oblivious to what was happening just over my shoulder. My daughter, who I thought was reading books to herself, had put the books down and was watching us and listening to our conversation intently.

In the car, later on, she asked, “Daddy, why did you give your computer to that man?” Fighting back emotion, I shared with her how her mother and I felt that two brand new computers was too much so we were led to give.

I’m not saying I have this whole giving thing down to a science or that I am a wizard at it (the Lord knows how much growing I have to do in this area). But I can say that my daughter, who is now almost 14 years old, has one of the most generous spirits of any kid her age.

When we model generosity for our children it changes their hearts. It gives them a healthy perspective on the world they live in. They desire, based on what they’ve learned from us, to become givers.

Ask yourself this question: “How generous am I?” Or more important, “How am I modeling generosity for my children?” Those are tough questions to stomach at times (they are for me too!). But, if we want to see our children grow up to be givers, they need to see this trait, not just living in us, but thriving in us!

The Hill of Unconditional Love.

The greatest gift we can give to our children is love. Loving them unconditionally for who they are, shortcomings and all, but also teaching them to love others. To instill a heart in our children that loves all people regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or creed will make this world a better place to live. I believe future generations will be impacted, even changed, through the love of our children and how they choose to live this out.

We are not just parents. Did you know that? When we invest in our children, we are future world shapers. We are legacy builders. What we impress on our children today, will be sowed into the world tomorrow. Love is the biggest seed we can sow.

We are the adoptive parents of 8 children, In-laws to one son-in-law and grandparents to one granddaughter. At this point, when I share that fact, most people give us a shocked look and follow that by asking “Really?” I can assure you, I’m not making that up! Along with adoption, our family is also transracial and interconnected to many different people from many different backgrounds. Some of our children were adopted through foster care and therefore have many birth family members that we see all the time.

The Hill Of Unconditional Love is a given in our family. It’s a given because we make it a given. It’s a value. It’s the only way to live as far as we are concerned. I don’t say that because we are a Christian family and I am a pastor. I don’t even say that because it’s the Christian thing to do. Both are true. It certainly is the Christian thing to do. Beyond the spirituality of unconditional love is humanity. Frankly, we believe loving others unconditionally is the *human* thing to do.

It's a value for us, as parents, to impress on our children love and respect for all human beings, regardless of race, gender, creed, or ethnicity. We believe strongly in this.

We believe with all of our heart that we can change the world by giving our lives to the cause of loving others unconditionally.

Is this a hill you are dying on daily for your children?

Now, Go...Charge That Hill!

Remember, a cause you believe in should be a hill you will die on.

Did you hear me?

A cause you believe in, should be a hill you will die on!

Repeat that to yourself over and over again. I do. There are days where I have to say it to myself repeatedly. Especially when our precious angels decide to act more like an enemy that needs to be taken down, than a cause I am willing to give my life for (kidding, of course!). I'm sure you can identify.

Do you believe in your family? Do you believe in doing what is right for your children? Are you committed to parenting on purpose, being intentional in what you say and do, and raising them into healthy, productive adults?

If so, it's time!

Go, charge these hills. Do it intentionally, do it unashamedly, and do it boldly! Choose to fight for the heart of your children. Battle to the death for the heart of your family. You have one chance, so make it count!

Resources.

I am pleased to share some resources that I have found to be extremely helpful as I continue to grow and transform as a parent and a spouse. These are organized by chapter.

The Hill Of Influence

- MichaelHyatt.com
- [The Parent Cue](#)

The Hill Of Boundaries

- [Boundaries With Kids](#) (book)

The Hill Of Discipline

- [The Principle Of The Path](#) (book)

The Hill Of Financial Responsibility

- DaveRamsey.com

The Hill Of Generosity

- [How To Be Rich](#) (book)

Miscellaneous Resources (stuff that's just good!)

- [Parenting Beyond Your Capacity](#) (book)
- [Roots For The Journey](#) (App)

About The Author

Mike Berry is an author, blogger, speaker, communicator, father, husband, family consultant, Taylor Swift fan, and lover of Thin Mint Cookies. He is the lead blogger and owner, along with his wife Kristin, of the parent blog, www.confessionsofaparent.com, which draws hundreds of thousands of readers monthly, from around the globe.

He has also contributed to various magazines including Hamilton County Families, Indy's Child, Cincinnati Parent, Dayton Parent and The Outlook Magazine.

Mike and his wife Kristin are passionate about reaching parents worldwide with a simple, yet transforming message: *there is hope and you are not alone on your parenting journey!*

Mike lives just outside of Indianapolis, Indiana with his amazing family and 3 not-so-bright, but loving dogs.

If you'd like to connect with Mike, here are some simple ways:

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If you would like to book Mike to speak at your event, please email speaking@confessionsmail.com. You can also visit his speaking page by clicking [here](#).

Learn more about the Berry's story by visiting www.confessionsofaparent.com/ourstory