

# PERSPECTIVE



Jamie ✓

Buckingham

When you have a family of five children, three of whom are teenagers, you seldom get the whole gang together. But last Monday night it was necessary to call a conference at the dinner table.

The topic of discussion was a problem that had arisen at church the night before. Three-fourths of the way through the service a gang of teenagers got up and walked out. They were led by my 16-year-old son, Bruce.

I hadn't noticed it since I was intent on listening to the sermon, but other folks noticed it. A great many of them, in fact. And they quickly informed me that it was my bushy-headed boy who led the pack.

I remained silent about the matter until after dessert and then announced the family conference. "Yes sir, Sarge," my 8-year-old, Sandy, said gruffly as she snapped to attention and gave a crooked salute.

Timmy, age 11, kicked her under the table and said, "Stupid, you don't salute sarges. They salute you."

"Okay, Dad, salute us or we'll put you in the guardhouse," Sandy said.

"Now, this is serious business," I said. "Cut out the horseplay. Bruce walked out of church last night and I want to know why."

Fourteen-year-old Robin giggled through her hand. "I knew you'd get caught," she said.

Bruce sat with head down and bottom lip poked out. Thirteen-year-old Bonnie snickered. "We told him not to, but he did anyway."

Bruce glowered across the table at his two sisters. "Well, you walked out, too."

"Oh, I didn't know that," I said, looking at the two girls who suddenly turned a brilliant red. "What I thought was a simple protest now sounds like a mutiny. However, I still hold Bruce responsible because he's the oldest and he led the way."

"But the service was too long," Bruce mumbled into his plate.

"I know," I sighed. "But that's no reason to walk out."

Suddenly, my patient, gentle son turned on me with fury in his voice. "Why is it you always pick on us?" he shouted. "You never tell us we do anything right. All you do is tell us what we do wrong! At least we were in church and not out smoking pot like a lot of other kids."

I was stunned. Not at his violent, rebellious answer, but at the rightness of what he was saying. Now it was my time to hang my head and look at my plate. When was the last time I had commended them for doing right? I couldn't remember.

Sensing he had stung me he apologized. "I'm sorry, Dad, but all you do is point out our mistakes."

"No. Don't back up, Bruce. You're right on this time. I'm going to have to put you all on restriction for last night's bad show, but I'm going on restriction with you, for copping out as a Daddy."

That night I did something I should have been doing all along. I made the rounds at bedtime and sat on the side of each bed, praying with each child. Then I said simply, "I love you and I'm proud of you. Keep up the good work."

It felt good to say it, because I meant it.