

Gideon's in His Pockets

Honestly, I think you'll agree, most folks don't listen when advice is offered on child rearing. Until a child ends up in real trouble -- jail or on drugs or in some terrible situation, most parents innately think they have enough 'on the ball' so to speak to raise their children. But then there are the few or the frustrated who seek out an oracle. For them, there are so many advisors publishing books, leading seminars and voicing opinions on the topic that they are numb to the plethora of so-called sages -- Christian and secular. So why should we throw our hat in the ring with even just a couple pages?

Because we passionately believe that all of us as Christians must fight for our children. The world wants them and sure enough Satan wants to destroy them. When you consider the inroads amoralists have made in shaping our society in the last couple of decades, it screams of parental lethargy in the spiritual sense. We simply wouldn't be where we are if, on the whole, Christian parents were as effective as they want to be.

So what makes us some wellspring of wisdom? Frankly, not much. And so, we humbly offer the following words as much from our blunders as our wonders. We are so grateful to God for having given us five children, two in heaven and three here on earth -- all of whom we know are born again and have a sincere, motivating love for Christ. And so we hope the brief tidbits

below will edify and encourage all of you who are parenting.

Your first ministry responsibility

Think of how much God gave to make you a part of His family. Whether pastor or evangelist or seams trice or mechanic, whether CEO or teacher or homemaker -- your highest priority in ministry to people should be the flock under your own roof. I struggled with this a bit when we started having children -- not that I didn't love them, but rather I was so intent on making ministry monuments (for myself really). After a few years of making some ghastly and grotesque ministerial 'meadow-muffins', I realized what I was missing -- the whole point. If you cannot minister in devotion and love to the little ones God has placed in your care, you dare not feign ministry elsewhere.

Now, notice that I said "ministry to people" above. Do not go the opposite direction and make your family's care something idolatrous. Do not place anyone or anything before your God and your ministry to Him. Your 'vertical' ministry should always take priority over your 'horizontal' ministry.

The Source

Go to the source, the fountain head. There are so many good books on childrearing that they can 'crowd out' the "Author and Perfector" of what we really need to understand. Nothing substitutes for lots of direct dail-in with the Lord. When our kids were growing up, God blessed me with a hour and a quarter commute to work for six years or so and I found it to be extremely valuable as prayer time -- lifting up my wife and kids day after day. I also find the quiet evening hours after every one has gone to bed

as wonderful prayer time. What ever time works for you, embrace it and spend LOTS of time in it.

Believing

I cannot count how many times some well meaning person expressed 'concern' for one of my kids. They were frequently the 'clown of the class' or getting into some mischief. As you well know, each child is a unique personality and rather than trying to force-fit them into some religiously defined mold of character, we found it far more important to simply have faith for each of them, that they would know and follow their Lord. I'm convinced that fearfulness for the spiritual welfare of your child can be as problematic as trusting God is beneficial. Believe God for your children. And recall that true faith is accompanied by responsive works -- loving, training, disciplining, guiding, and encouraging. Don't give in to expecting the worst from them. Continually surrender your fears to God and remember He loves them far more than you. Contrary to some people's expectation, all our kids are wonderfully saved, have indeed led numerous other people to faith in Christ and are engaged in serving the Lord. What greater joy can a parent have?!

Being real -- bearing fruit after your kind

Our kids have gotten so many apologies from us for myriad failures throughout their lives. Admitting your foul-ups doesn't need to demean your godly parental authority. On the contrary, it's the people who are the most real and honest with us as adults who are the ones we love and appreciate all the more. The same is valid with our kids. Now, the flip side

of that coin is that we never abdicated our role as parents. Being a real person doesn't mean that your kids are right and you're wrong. It seems like every 'family-oriented' movie we've seen in last few years puts parents in the position as total losers, goof-balls that the kids need to set straight. That is terribly damaging to a child's perspective. Rebelliousness is being glorified in our media and its origin is very sinister.

Ultimately, your kids are going to model their parents to some degree. You bear fruit 'after your kind' as the KJV Bible says. To the degree your kids witness the reality of Christ in your life, they have the best opportunity to ultimately find it for themselves. If you're lukewarm, don't expect them to be 'on fire'. Clearly, there are exceptions to this but they are exceptions. Why else do you think the scripture says of the believer that, "his righteousness is unto his children's children."?

Protecting

I'm pretty slow-witted so it took me a few years to realize that if I allowed my kids to camp out in front of the TV, that the media producers would be more influential in forming their characters than anything/anyone else. We simply turned it off. I know that's extreme, but at the very least we should, as parents, be very careful of what we allow into our kids minds, especially when they are little. We must be discerning of what messages are being planted there -- it's NOT just the violence or sex or cursing -- it's the MESSAge that's equally if not more impacting.

Training

They'll probably be the first to tell you, yes, I force-fed my family the

scripture. We had family Bible studies for the entirety of their youth and sometimes it was not so much appreciated as endured. As quiet as I normally am, I can drone on forever when you put a Bible in my hand and a captive audience in front of me. Ha! In addition, we strongly encouraged the kids to adopt a daily meaningful devotional time – their ‘quiet time’.

You know the Word instructs us to train up a child in the way he should go. Notice the emphasis on the positive in that. Everything about loving God and serving Him is indeed put in that light in scripture – oh, not that it’s easy or without trial. But rather that as parents, it’s important to portray the Christian life as God sees it, not as the world does. The world taunts that Christianity is a matter of do’s and don’ts with emphasis on the latter. Exposing that perspective as bogus and demonstrating that your faith in Jesus is the most powerful, real and best part of your life is critical in training your child.

Loving discipline

It’s a bunch of contemporary Laodecian malarkey that you should never spank your kids. Hogwash!! That is expressly contrary to scripture. So much media focus has of late been on abuse that we’ve been brainwashed into a Dr. Spock-based fearfulness. If you lovingly discipline your kids, including when necessary a reasonable spanking, they will love you all the more. I recommend that if you spank, don’t use your hand. Use something else and let your hands always be for comforting and support. If you need to spank, never do it in public; never humiliate your child before others;

always explain what and why. If you need to spank then spank until they’ve gotten the message and it’s clear that rebellion is released. Now, please hear me on this – don’t ever spank in anger or to an extreme. Don’t ever allow such punishment to truly hurt your child if you know what I mean. My grandfather was seemingly mercilessly whipped with a belt as a child and as a consequence would never discipline his own kids – it was left to grandma. You must be calm, loving and discerning in this. And this is key – after you are done, you should love on them big time. The point is to teach a lasting lesson, not to create alienation.

My youngest, Gabe, got in trouble one time and was sent up to his room to await a spanking. Generally, I would give a few swats across the bottom. Anticipating this, he found a couple of little green Gideon’s Bibles and stuck them in his back pockets. Thinking he’d outwitted dad, he was fully prepared to ‘fake-it’ big time. However, to his chagrin, when I came in, not knowing what he’d done, I simply said, “OK, Gabe, you really blew it this time – drop ‘em.” (his pants, that is) At this, I thought I noticed a certain shock and chagrin. Ha! When he grew up, he laughingly confessed to this scheme – I never knew.

You know, this is exactly what we as believers seek to do as well in a spiritual sense. But, if God let us get away with putting Gideon’s in our back pockets so to speak, we’d never learn the critical lessons of our Christian walk. Who the Lord loves, He corrects. (Pro 3:12)

God bless you as you raise your children to love God in these last days.