

Parenting

by Beverly Littau

Melissa and Jim have been married for three years, and decided to start a family. They anxiously anticipate the day when their little baby boy will be born and placed in their arms for the first time. They prepare the baby's room, go to prenatal visits with their doctor, and spend countless hours poring over baby names books in search of the name that is "just right."

Gwen and Steve are blessed with twin girls through an adoption agency. They are thrilled with their little daughters, especially after dealing with the heartbreak of infertility for years. They feel ready to be parents, having spent a great deal of time with the children of their friends and family members.

Mike, Stephanie, and Christina are all single parents nevertheless through different circumstances: divorce, unplanned pregnancy, and death. They love their children and want to give them the best home that they possibly can.

Though their situations are different, all of these families have one thing in common. They have no formal preparation to be a good parent. The fact is, most parents don't. How many of us wish that we could have taken "Parenting 101" in college?

Fortunately, there are many good parenting classes offered through agencies and churches in most towns. Many times, parents don't avail themselves of these until they experience frustration in trying to raise their child.

The task of parenting is complex and parents experience a mountain of emotions as they maneuver through the endless maze of decisions that each day brings: love, joy, sadness, frustration, pride, confusion, anger, and fear. It is important that parents have some sort of framework to guide them as they make day-to-day decisions about parenting.

The Bible is an excellent source of wisdom, encouragement, and guidance for the parent who wants to raise children that will develop a sense of responsibility and purpose and an understanding of ethical, moral, and spiritual principles.

It is not possible in such a short writing to lay out every possible guideline for parenting. The purpose here is to give some "food for thought" and some basic principles and to seek to answer some often asked questions.

What are You Aiming For?

You as a parent must decide what are the things you want to create in your child. What are your priorities? What values are you wanting to instill? What kind of adult do you want them to become?

The reason it is important to know the answer to these questions is that it is on the basis of those things that you will make parenting decisions. Do you want your child to become responsible? Then parent in a way so as to create that. Do you want your child to know God? Your parenting should encourage your child in that direction.

This is called "shaping." In no way does it mean that you will decide ahead of time what your child will play in sports or what career he or she will choose. Instead, it simply means that you are shaping him or her into the kind of human being you want your child to be. That is good parenting!

What Are You Reinforcing?

Sometimes, parents struggle with discipline, especially when dealing with very strong-willed children. A really strong-willed child will work to get his or her way in a variety of ways, from throwing a tantrum to simply pushing and pushing until the parent (often in exhaustion) gives in.

What is important to remember is that as a parent you are continually reinforcing your child's behavior, both positively and negatively. If you want your child to learn that "pushing" you is not going to get them what they want, then simply don't give in to their pushing. If you want them to learn that tantrums won't work, then you must not ever let them work!

A simple principle, right? Yet the truth is that sometimes in the heat of the moment, even the strongest parent will be tempted to cave in and give Johnny or Suzie what they want.

How Can I Build Self-Esteem in My Child?

Self-esteem is largely built in two ways. One way is reflection and the other way is success.

1) Reflection happens when parents reflect back to the child what they see. Children first see themselves through the eyes of others, and generally their very first experience of that comes from the parent.

Build your child's self-esteem by your words and behaviors that tell them that you see good things in them. Remind them that they are one of God's creations, and that He put all kinds of good qualities in them!

2) Success helps build self-esteem as well. Give your child opportunities to succeed in such things as chores and doing things for themselves whenever it is developmentally appropriate. Equally important is allowing the child to experience frustration in the process of learning a new task, because by working through the frustration and achieving the goal, the child will learn not to give up. When he or she experiences success, it will add building blocks to the foundation of self-esteem.

Finally, in order to raise a healthy child, it is important that parents work on their own health as well, so as to model emotional health for their child. A healthy parent is a gift to your child!

Bible Verses to Consider

Proverbs 22:6 "Train a child in the way according to his bent, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Colossians 3:21 "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children."

Proverbs 19:18 "Discipline your children, for in that there is hope."

Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Proverbs 15:4 “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”

Matthew 19:14 “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

Joshua 24:15 “Choose this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”