

Problems with Parenting

Dr. David Shaw

Every day we hear the stories from our friends or see it happen in our own family. That dear, sweet, little bundle of joy that was so cute as an infant and destined to be the President of the United States is living a life of rebellion against their upbringing. Teens raised in the church become involved with gangs, drugs, sexual immorality, and gangs. Family relationships, once close knit and loving, are in shambles. With the thought “this is only supposed to happen to other people” husbands and wives are stunned.

This scene goes all the way back to Adam and Eve who had great hopes for their boys. One son honored God and his parents. The other son was stubborn, self-willed, and hot-tempered. Why is this so? Does the answer lie solely in our way of parenting, or are there other factors at work?

Does good parenting guarantee good kids?

Some families seem to step off the cover of a Hallmark card. The children are polite, exhibit wonderful manners, and demonstrate great respect. When we see scenes like this played out before our eyes, we wonder, “What are they doing that we are not doing? What is their secret?” We might even ask. However, whatever answer you receive (even if they have some wonderful tips to offer by way of parenting) there is no magic formula. *There are no foolproof methods of parenting, because no parent can ever perfectly carry out any plan.* THE BEST GUIDE WE HAVE IS THE BIBLE, AND THE FOCUS THERE IS ON BEING A BIBLICAL PARENT.

Train Up a Child in the Way He Should Go

Proverbs 22:6 is a very familiar text that sounds very much like a “formula to follow that guarantees success.” Many people use it to claim that wayward children will one day return to God. Is that the meaning? (See Cain). Proverbs are maxims. They describe in a general sense the way God intends the world to operate. Proverbs 10:4 is a case in point. Many hard working rice farmers in developing countries never get rich, but that does not invalidate the truth that hard work is profitable. Proverbs 22:6 is a wise maxim. It is saying that if you train up a child in the way he/she wants to go (selfishness), there is no hope of his ever departing from that. In that sense it is a warning.

Even if you exegete the passage as a promise, it is a general principle that it is a good thing to raise children in a godly way. In general, children from Christian families who honor the Scriptures usually turn out much better than children raised in unbelieving homes that reject His Word.

No matter how diligent you are in directing children to the Lord, keep in mind that three components are at work:

A. The Responsibility of the Parent

Parents are responsible to honor the Lord and obey His word. Shepherding a Child's Heart is an excellent resource. We are to diligently work to drive out foolishness and build in wisdom. (Proverbs 29:17; Proverbs 23:13-14; Ephesians 6:4)

B. The Responsibility of the Child

Godly parenting does not guarantee great kids because children make choices that are outside our ability to control. When children are young, because you are physically bigger than they are, you might have the false illusion of control. As they get older and begin to think for themselves, they question whether or not they want to embrace your values and your paths. In fact, reputation is based on decisions, as Proverbs 20:11 teaches: "Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright. Even the Lord Himself knows what it is like to have his children turn their back on Him. Throughout the OT, Israel is portrayed as God's son (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Isaiah 1:2). When you are rejected think of Christ on the cross.

C. God Never Ceases To Be God

It is a very humbling but liberating truth: As a parent, you are not ultimately in charge of your child's life. You are powerless to create faith in your child's heart. Biblically speaking, there are no good parents and no good children. There is only a Good God who gives to sinner's mercy and grace. As a parent, that makes me want to cling to God like a little child.