

The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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What We Would Do If We Were Starting Out As Parents (2)

By Norman and Ann Bales

Continued from last month...

But there is more. In verses 26 and 27 (of Exodus 12), he said, "And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians."

In Exodus 13, God gave instructions about what the children of Israel were to do after they crossed the Jordan River into the promised land. In verse 14, he said, "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'" In Deuteronomy 4:9, after a recital of the law, the children of Israel were given the following exhortation, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them." The prophet, Joel, spoke of great things that God has done. In Joel 1:2-3, he said, "Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation."

We are in our sixties. Our children are grown and we have grandchildren. In this series of articles we have been reflecting on what we think we might do if we were starting out as parents today. There's a reason why people have children when they are young. A part of that reason involves a certain naiveté. If young people were to know what we know now, they might hesitate to bring newborn infants into the world. We would then be faced with an "underpopulation" crisis. We're not among those who wish that they had never brought children into the world. For every problem we've encountered there have been dozens of blessings. It's a fascinating mental exercise to ask yourself, "What would you do if you were starting all over in the parenting business?" Of course we would want to turn the clock back forty years or so and in the process of doing that we would lose the wisdom we think we've gained.

PRAYER

There's a comment made about the life of Job that every parent needs to think about. "His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom" (Job 1:4-5).

Job remembered his children before the throne of God on a regular basis. In the King James Version, James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." In the same context, he goes on to say that "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years." The same God who answered Elijah's prayer to withhold the rain hears your prayers for your child. We wish our children had heard us pray with the same fervency and frequency that we pray now.

DISCIPLINE

If we were to start out as new parents today, we would resolve to practice consistent discipline. Norman comments, "As I review my own perfor-

mance as a father, I think I probably fell short most in this area than perhaps in any other. I didn't fail to discipline our children. It's that word "consistent" that nails me. It's so tempting when you come home from work and you're very tired to avoid the unpleasantness of administering correction. A child makes an unreasonable demand, but you're so exhausted that your mind screams, 'I want rest. I want peace. I want quiet.' So you're an easy target for junior's unreasonable demand. On the other hand, there's the possibility that you'll come home from work after an upsetting conversation with your boss. Since you want to keep your job, you don't tell him what you're really thinking. You leave the work place seething with anger. When you walk in the door your wife tells you that your 'little angels' seem to have sprouted horns. Consequently, you take your anger out on the children in an inappropriate way. You treat your children as though they were rebellious when they've really been nothing but neglectful."

Every child needs discipline. James Dobson has advanced the theory that all children want discipline, even though they don't tell you they want it. Children simply do not say to their parents, "Mom and Dad, I think a little punitive discipline would enhance my development at this time." On the contrary, it seems to be the nature of children to test your willingness to discipline by challenging the limits. Maybe there are compliant children in the world who do everything their parents ask of them. We didn't raise any children like that.

Discipline has to be firm, consistent and loving beginning at a very young age. Tim La Haye says that fifty percent of a child's character and personality is established by the time he is three

and seventy five percent by the time he is five. That probably hasn't been scientifically verified, but it's not too far off the mark. Proverbs 19:18 says, "Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death."

LISTEN

We're not aware of a Biblical text that explicitly says, "Listen to your children." However, it is implied. In Colossians 3:21, Paul wrote, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. If you were to decide that you wanted to embitter your child, we can't think of a more effective way than simply refusing to listen to what your child has to say. All people want to be heard and children are people. Parents have a problem here. As parents, we are so anxious to share what we have learned through the experience of living, that we don't think that it's important to listen to what our children are trying to tell us.

But the message we communicate when we do that is, "I'm not interested in you." Listening to a child is hard, because so much of what they want to tell you is nonsense, but buried down inside that are some very important things you need to know.

While preparing these thoughts we discovered a old yellow sheet of paper we had saved over the years. It was in our oldest Son's handwriting and it was titled "The Real Me." He probably wrote it sometime during junior high, maybe even elementary school. It has no date on it. He was writing down his philosophy of life. Let me share just a little of it with you. He said, "School is boring and time consuming." What would you expect a junior high student to say about school? He said, "Someday Philippe Petite is going to fall off his wire and kills himself." Then there was this entry. "I wish that Lloyd Ruby would win the Indy 500." Here's

the last one "I feel happy when David Stoneking is absent." Now as you can see these were not exactly life-altering issues. But buried in there were these two other comments and if we hadn't been interested in what the boy thought about a seventies race car drive named Lloyd Ruby, we might not have found out what else he wrote in these two comments. "I feel badly when I can't watch TV, when somebody dies or when pollution destroys real life." And here's a real gem. "I can talk easily to my Dad and my best friend." Hearing those things that were really important also involved hearing what he thought about school. Listen! - It can make all the difference in the world in a child's life and yours.

CONCLUSION

We can't control the destiny of our children, but without a doubt our families have tremendous influence. A few years back, David Lewis, Carley Dodd and Darrell Tippins, authored a book titled *The Gospel According to Generation X: The Culture of Adolescent Belief*. They reported on data from 4,000 adolescents. They attempted to find out what young people believe and why. They concluded that a number of different influences have an impact on the belief system of today's youth. These include things like peer influence, television, music, etc. They also discovered that parents have the most influence in developing the faith and commitment of today's youth. What an important responsibility we have as parents.

—From *All About Families*,
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