

The Parent as Principal Teacher

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Being a mom or dad is easy. It is what our children allow us to be with their co-operation and permission.

As parents we have been entrusted with one of the greatest privileges, namely, the responsibility of nurturing and teaching our children.

James Baldwin, an American novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, and activist observed "Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

As parents we must walk the talk!

My wife was fastidious in recording the "philosophy of life" according to Joshua (our son).

This was his take at the age of five on quietness: "Lying in bed, dad was listening to the news on the radio. You were noisy. Dad tried to quieten you down but to no avail. Mom intervened to which you responded, 'why did you have a child? If you did not want noise then you should not have had a child!'"

Out of the mouths of babes.

What is it that God wants us to teach our children?

Here is a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 11:18-21 from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, "*Place these words [from God] on your hearts. Get them deep inside you. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder.*

"Teach them to your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning until you fall into bed at night. Inscribe them on the doorposts and gates of your cities so that you'll live a long time, and your children with you, on the soil that God promised to give you"

It God's will that parents accept the responsibility of educating their young.

Sadly, the educators in our schools have become the surrogate teachers of the values that parents should be imparting.

Sure, it is tough to hold down a job, but we have just one shot at being a parent.

In the endeavour to educate our children perhaps we could consider the following:

- Teach them cherished values and model it for them.
- Model habits of joy - not only happiness - for them. Happiness is dependent upon circumstance, but joy is within despite circumstance.
- Teach them that stuff is secondary to people. We often seem to be living by the adage, "the one who dies with the most toys, wins!"
- Teach your child to volunteer without expecting compensation – help them to discover how good it feels to help others.
- Teach your child to care about others in need by giving some of their allowance to a worthy cause.
- Help them not to take things for granted by teaching them to share. "Sharing is caring".
- When we prioritise our child's emotional needs, then possessions become secondary. It is an antidote to entitlement.
- Children who experience empathy learn to empathise. After all, will want to be supported by caring children in our old age.

We are to constantly look for ways to model and teach the Word of God such as the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20) and the Beatitudes Gospel of Matthew 5.

We are to consistently treat our spouse, our parents, and our children in ways that model God's Word.

Someone has rightly said, "Children are natural mimics who act like their parents in spite of every attempt to teach them good manners."

God is a parent; a perfect parent, who knows all that parenting entails. It is a great relief to know we are not alone in our parenting responsibility as teachers.

Here is a prayer by General Douglas MacArthur I have adapted:

Build me a [child], O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when they are weak, and brave enough to face when they are afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a child whose wishbone will not be where their backbone should be; a child who will know Thee. Lead them, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let my child learn to stand up in the storm; here let my child learn compassion for those who fail.

Build me a child whose heart will be clean, whose goal will be high; a child who will master self before my child seek to master others; one who will learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are theirs, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humour, so that my child may always be serious, yet never take themselves too seriously. Give my child humility, so that my child may always remember the simplicity of greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

Then I, as parent, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain."

Who knows, when parents embrace their primary role as teacher, it may just completely transform our education system in the process – how I pray!

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