

Inner Peace #6

The problem of raising kids in a wicked world

Intro: I remember it pretty clearly. I was sitting across the table from an older friend who was talking about raising children. Of course, his children were grown. He commented, “As evil as the world is today, I’m not sure I’d have children if I had to raise them in this world we’re living in”.

If there is anything that can serve as a challenge to the inner peace of an adult it is the challenge of raising children in an evil culture. We lie awake at night, maybe after a difficult day with many episodes of bad behavior to correct or maybe a serious confrontation about involvement in a harmful practice. And we think, “My child is going to end up in the penitentiary someday!” Or, we may internalize and say, “Where did I go wrong as a parent? How did I fail my child?” Those will not be one of your more peaceable moments.

We worry about our children, about their future, about what they’ll become, especially knowing the temptations they will face. Has God any words of assurance for us? Is there anything we can learn or do to help them avoid disastrous scenarios? How can we find peace as a parent?

Let’s go back to the wise man Solomon for some helpful proverbs on parenting.

He urges us to see the blessing of good parenting—the joy of raising a wise child and the sorrow of raising a foolish one.

A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

(Prov. 10:1)

A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother (Prov. 15:20).

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him (Prov. 17:25).

He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy (Prov. 17:21).

I’ve wondered did Solomon write these words primarily for the parents or for the children. If to parents, these proverbs give us three important points of emphasis:

Our own ultimate sorrow or joy is bound up in our efforts to raise our children. These outcomes should provide the motivation to be on our task constantly; for every day we sow the seeds of our own grief or happiness.

The ultimate quest of parenting is to produce a wise child. In the context of the wisdom literature, “wisdom” is a moral quality and not merely an intellectual one. Keep this goal ever before you—that your ultimate goal is to help your child love and respect God and to be obedient to Him! (not just you!!!)

Our success as parents will in many ways be determined by how we “present God” to our children. We must know and love Him with all our

hearts and we must model this obedience day by day. We must create awareness in them that our actions are motivated by this ultimate concern. We want to please God!

He encourages us to have a hopeful attitude about our children.

Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul (Prov. 29:17).

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

These two proverbs give us assurance that we can succeed at our goal. In the first proverb we are assured of the comfort and delight we spoke about earlier. In the second, there is even the suggestion of a lasting impact that goes throughout life.

The hopefulness of parenting centers in two words:

Train—train, imbue

Correct—correct, admonish

The training we offer must be geared to the features of each child which is created with its own personality (cf. “according to his way” in Prov. 22:6).

Third, he encourages the use of the time-honored techniques of discipline by verbal reproof and by corporal punishment in making a child wise

Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death (Prov. 19:18).

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother (Prov. 29:15).

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him (Prov. 22:15).

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently (Prov. 13:24).

Do not hold back discipline from the child; although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol (Prov. 23:13-14).

These proverbs suggest a number of important principles for parenting:

Discipline in whatever form must be administered in a context of love. It

brings together the two essentials of parenting: love and control. Our children must know that we care about them deeply and that we are thankful to God to have them and to be trusted with their care; and we should try to communicate that to them through affection and by being responsive to their needs. It is this ongoing love that builds trusts and the willingness of a child to listen to his parents and know that they have his best interest at heart.

The ultimate aim of discipline is to teach self-control. By the application of an unpleasurable experience as the consequence of misbehavior, a child learns to develop inward controls to avoid the behavior. He learns that his actions have consequences and that he may choose the outcome by choosing the behavior. As he/she gets older inward motivations take over. The desire to please parents, to please God, to receive benefits causes him to behave

properly. Corporal punishment phases out and inward motivation and control takes its place.

The Biblical encouragement of corporal punishment should not be equated with or used as justification for abuse or mistreatment. In fact, proper punishment according to rules will help to prevent angry punishment according to emotions—emotions that sometimes produce the abuse children suffer. When modern counselors urge parents to desist from the use of corporal punishment they defy thousands of years of conventional wisdom. They often cite studies where corporal punishment was used improperly and even abusively as a justification for not practicing the proper discipline. This is comparing apples with oranges. Solomon urged upon parents discipline that is loving and regulated by rules rather than emotions.

Here again the presumption is that consistent loving discipline will bring about the removal of “foolishness” and replace it with “wisdom”. Why experiment with the uncertain ways of men, when you have before your own experience and the revelation of God?

Conclusion: As parents we know there is a lot to lose when children do not listen or heed their instruction. They do not come with “responsible maturity guaranteed” stickers. But we need not overly worry about their outcome. You’ll have your moments when you’ll wonder if its all going to work out right. Set your mind at ease. Have faith that God’s way will work.