

Who is Nurturing Our Children?

Introduction: It was early morning, and as I walked through an extremely poor village in Sierra Leone I heard the voices of children. I turned to see maybe a dozen children – from maybe 5 years old to near teen – sitting on crude benches, repeating what a man was saying to them. I didn't understand what they were saying in unison, but not because it was in an African tribal language – because it was in Arabic. They were the children of Muslims and were repeating prayers and sections of the Quran in a language they did not speak or even understand. They were hot, dirty, hungry, uncomfortable, outside where other things were vying for their attention, many of their friends were not there, they had no books or materials or pictures or visual aids, and it wasn't even in their language!

Islam – in spite of its fanatical right-wing (which are a small minority of Muslims), makes the claim that it is the fastest growing religion in the world. This does NOT imply that they are the right religion or that their methods are necessarily correct. In fact, it may actually imply the opposite. However, when I looked at the effort and determination of those children in the village (or of that of their parents), I realized that Islam is going to be a formidable challenge for future generations because they are training and indoctrinating future generations now.

We need to examine what we do as parents (and as mentors / family / influencers on young people). Note: I am not an expert, nor have I done this perfectly – But God's word IS perfect!

I. “do not provoke your children to wrath” -- Ephesians 6:4

A. Different translation:

1. NIV: Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
2. This is about shutting down nurturing with them before it even starts
 - a. We focus on “DO THIS” but sometimes it is empty and ineffective, not because it really IS empty and ineffective, but because they aren't listening due to provocation

B. Practical examples:

2. Note: This is NOT saying “never make your kid angry” or “if your kid thinks your rules are too strict or that you are being unreasonable – then you are doing something wrong”
 - a. A child's perception should sometimes be taken into consideration (it may be reasonable, it may be unreasonable)
 - b. A child's perception is NOT the standard – “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” IS the standard. Provoking kids to wrath happens when our training and correcting is inconsistent with the ways of God (and that's what they are sometimes feeling)
3. Examine yourself / your parenting for:
 - a. Inconsistency [He 13:8; Ep 4:1; Ph 1:27; 1 Ti 4:12]
 - 1) Rules that apply to kid but not to parent
 - 2) Be the person you want your child to be
 - 3) Rules that sometimes apply and sometimes don't (things are sometimes right and sometimes wrong)
 - 4) Don't let them start what they will have to stop (modesty, dancing, etc.)
 - b. Selfishness – rules and actions that always only serve the parent [Ph 2:3-4]
 - c. Rules without reason / Power game / Might is right
 - d. Favoritism (real or perceived) [Ro 2:11 – “God shows no favoritism” NIV]
 - 1) Pitting kids against each other
 - 2) Comparing kids to each other (or to other people's kids)

- e. Unwillingness to listen [Ja 1:19 “quick to hear”]
- f. Fairness (the Bible word is “righteousness”)
- g. Correction
 - 1) No correction [Pr 13:24]
 - a) Never tell them “no” or that they did wrong
 - b) Re-make the world so that they get what they want and never have to hear “no”
 - c) Enforcement is a blessing to child [Ep 6:1-3]
 - 2) In anger [Ja 1:20]
 - 3) Public
 - 4) When expectations / rules were not clear
 - 5) Without reason or explanation 6) Punishment doesn’t fit the crime
 - 7) Punishment isn’t carried out / is changed to be pleasant [He 12:11]
 - a) Be careful making threats
 - b) Don’t open windows of disobedience [I’m going to count to 3] 8) Ridicule, not correction [Pr 14:9]
- 4. Unrealistic expectations
 - a. Parent living life through kid
- 5. Expecting kids to be your “friend” or “confident” or “support” or “life fulfillment”
- 6. Expecting to be your kids’ friend 6. Note: He 12:10 – doing the best we can?

II. “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” – Ep 6:4

A. Intentional “bringing them up”

- 1. A process – not just one thing and one time
 - a. An intentional / planned / thought about process – reap what we sow
 - b. Looking for and making opportunities – De 6:7-9
 - 1) Plan to make it happen
 - 2) Fight to make it happen
- 2. A direction – “up” – what direction are your kids headed and do you are a major part in it?
 - a. Consider: academics, athletics, social life, faith and character 1) Which is most important?
 - 2) Which gets most of your time, effort, money, planning? 3) Which gets largest space on your calendar?
 - 4) Which has the most “have to”?
 - b. Don’t YOU idolize (don’t let them idolize) ungodly people or activities

B. “in the training” [of the Lord] “admonition [instruction] of the Lord”

- 1. Ps 127; Pr 22:6
- 2. Why would we try to raise our children differently than we would make a true, strong disciple of Jesus Christ?
 - a. This is about who they are (not just what they do and don’t do)
 - b. They are being told who they SHOULD BE by the world and Satan
 - 1) Caught up in body image, materialism [I’m important because of what I have]
 - 2) What they are missing in life experiences, rushed to adulthood
 - c. Children need to be confident about who they are as (or growing to be) servants of God
 - 1) Needs to touch EVERY aspect of life
 - 2) Have the difficult, awkward, embarrassing, “unnecessary” (because I don’t think they would ever think or do it – say it anyway!), conversations

- a) “If we don’t teach our children who God is someone else will teach them everything that He isn’t”
 - b) Our kids ARE talking about these things – in middle school (even elementary school) – even keeping them home, monitoring their friends – they need to know the truth about relationships, sex, etc. (the beauty of holiness in these, not just the dirty side)
- 3. Active, consistent exposure to Jesus / the Bible – Who He is, what He did, why He did it, what it means to follow Him is how to raise up a child.
 - a. This is intentional
 - 1) Not just what the church is doing
 - 2) Don’t nothing gives the world / Satan advantage – 1 Co 2:14
 - b. This involves words, but especially actions they can see and emulate
 - c. Are we actively TRAINING and INSTRUCTING our children?
 - 1) Note the problem of not applying the training to self and trying to get another person (child) to accept training from you
 - 2) Not: Do as I say, not as I do
- 4. Practical:
 - a. Don’t:
 - 1) Don’t allow ungodly actions of others (including the media) in your presence without you reacting in a godly way
 - 2) Don’t take pleasure (or allow them to) in ungodliness (even if you do not personally participate in it) – Ro 1:32
 - 3) Don’t revel in the memory of ungodly activities which you did when you were young or before you were a Christian
 - 4) Don’t allow your children to pretend to do ungodly things (it’s not cute)
 - 5) Be willing to strictly limit worldly exposure or participation in areas where your child shows weakness
 - 6) Don’t compromise because of their crying (whining, complaining, pouting, “you don’t love me”, they don’t agree or understand, how it makes them appear strange to others or causes loss of friends) – Pr 19:18
 - b. Do:
 - 1) Let your child see / hear you apologize for sins they know about
 - 2) Let your child see / year you pray / study
 - 3) Make personal Bible study / worship / serving others a major priority in your life
 - 4) Be 100% confident that God’s way is always best for you and your children
 - 5) Love God and others
 - 6) Complement your children, especially the spirituality you see in them
 - 7) Filter, censor, direct exposure
 - 8) Do value spiritual things more than anything else
 - a) There is a very real sense in which holiness is the only purpose that God has for your life (and that for those around you)
 - b) Simplify your life / schedule to spend time together as a family and with God’s people
 - 9) Do recognize that your children are under attack – Satan and the world – ugly, fat, dumb, friendless, alone, not cool, not special, not accepted, etc – when they CAN be chosen and special – 1 Pe 2:9

Conclusion: It isn't a coincidence that all followers of Jesus are called "children of God." The family relationship is supposed to be a model of our relationship with God. Sometimes we lose that idea and think our family is about ourselves or our kids or just enjoying the world / life. We need to wake up and see what life is all about and make our families about that.

Note:

TV – 2-5 yr – 32 hrs a week; 6-11 28 hrs wk; 71% 8-18 yr have TV in bedroom. Average American child will see 200k violent acts and 16k murders on media by age 18.

<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv>

School – 1302 hrs per year / 15,624 hrs in 12 yrs.

Even most kids today when asked say that they spend too much time online / on phone / on social media

Teens spend an average of 9 hours a day online (6 hrs for those age 8-12; 50 mins for kids 0 to 8)

Tech companies, including Google and Apple, have ways of monitoring and limiting online time and content

Many teens report experiencing anxiety when they don't have access to their phones

While 72% of parents say their teen is sometimes or often distracted by their phone while having real-life conversations, more than half (51%) of teens say the same about their parents.

<https://qz.com/1367506/pew-research-teens-worried-they-spend-too-much-time-on-phones/>

1 Co 15:33 – evil companions

4 hrs a week?

18 yrs – 18,000 hrs of TV / 15k+ hrs in school / 3744 hrs in worship / Bible study?