

“SHADE FOR OUR KIDS...”

1/10/16

An old Chinese proverb says, “One generation plants the trees and another gets the shade.” Our generation has lived in the shade of many trees that were planted by *our* parents. Spiritually speaking, we derive shade from our parents’ and grandparents’ ethical standards—their perceptions of right and wrong, their sense of moral duty, and above all, their spiritual commitment. Their ideals have determined the kind of civilization we inherited from them; in the same way, our generation’s ideals will likewise shape tomorrow’s culture for *our* kids...

Folks, the truth is, today’s culture is in a state of moral & spiritual decline ... and has been for some time. Now, whether you agree with decisions I’m about to mention or not is not the point; the point is, there seems to be some major confusion going on in our world today. Let me give you some examples:

- A court in Janesville, Wisconsin, sentenced a man to 12 years in prison for killing five cats ‘to relieve stress’; two days after that man began serving his time, a Delaware court sentenced a woman to only 30 months in prison for killing her newborn infant...

It should be clear that our society—as a whole—no longer believes humans are made in the image of God—no different than animals; if you’re not convinced yet, let me share with you a major influence that’s been busy shaping our society for several years...

- Ingrid Newkirk, founder of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) says, “There is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. When it comes to a central nervous system, and the ability to feel pain, hunger, and thirst, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.” Newkirk sees no difference between the atrocities of WWII, for instance, and killing animals for food ... as she goes on to say: “Six million Jews died in concentration camps, but six *billion* broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses.”

Now, *I’ve loved every pet we’ve had, but those pets are not my kids (or my grandkids)!* According to God who created us, there’s a difference!

But our world, at this time, is full of similar frightening trends! We’ve lost our moral compass—really, to know the difference between right and wrong! We’ve learned to listen to the voice of a so-called modern society ... rather than learning to listen to the unwavering truth of God’s word! So, folks, let’s ask these questions:

- Where’s our culture going?
- What kind of value system, what kind of morality, and what kind of world are we establishing for the next generation?

- And, as Christians, are we planting any shade trees for our children? Or, are we leaving them totally exposed to the elements of an un-Christian society—unprotected from the next best thing in a self-guided culture? *Listen to this...*

Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do. ² "Respect your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise added: ³ "so that all may go well with you, and you may live a long time in the land." ⁴ Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction. – Ephesians 6:1-4 (TEV)

The truth is, folks, *the family* as many of us have known it is dying; but it's not too late to save *the family*—what many believe to be the foundation of our Christian heritage—God's plan for the way we live out these lives in community, support one another, and work alongside God for Kingdom purposes! *Let me begin with some foundational principles for parenting—no matter how you connect with that activity...* First, know this:

CHILDREN SHOULD BE A BLESSING, NOT A HARDSHIP! ²⁷ So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, ²⁸ blessed them, and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. – Genesis 1:27-28 (TEV) If you remember the creation story from Genesis, Adam & Eve ate the forbidden fruit before they had conceived any offspring; yet God did not simply destroy them and start over with a new race, did he? Instead, God permitted Adam & Eve to fulfill the command given them before the Fall: Be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). When God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin, God multiplied the *pain* of the childbirth process (Gen. 3:16), but he did not nullify the *blessing* inherent in bearing children. *Children were a blessing from God ... from the very beginning ... and were recognized as such.* Clearly, in the plan of God, *children are meant to be a blessing ... not a hardship!* And, they usually are a blessing ... when they arrive... However, left exposed to this world and unshaded by the proper kind of protection, they will indeed break your heart ... which leads us to the next foundational biblical principle...

PARENTING SHOULD BE A JOY, NOT A BURDEN! ¹⁷ Discipline your children; you'll be glad you did— they'll turn out delightful to live with. – Proverbs 29:17 (MSG) And who doesn't want that? Folks, as Pastor John MacArthur used to say, "*The parent's task is not a yoke to be borne; it's a privilege to be enjoyed!*" If the children God gives us in life are intended to be a blessing, then the task of parenting (which actually includes most adults) is nothing more than an extension of that blessing! On the other hand, *to neglect one's duty before God as a parent ... is to forfeit the blessing God intends—* taking on a burden that was never God's intention for us to bear...

Now, please don't think I'm trying to paint an unrealistic picture of parenting today. I'll be the first to admit ... there are some distasteful aspects to parenting (like these):

- *Discipline* – Why kids think that parents enjoy this part of parenting, I don't know! I remember my brother & me lining up outside my father's study, waiting for our spanking, after he'd come home from a business trip; we always thought he enjoyed the spanking, until we became parents ourselves...
- *Peer pressure* – Kids think we don't like their friends, when all we want to make sure of, is that we have a little more influence than their friends at guiding their lives in a Godly way; that's *our* responsibility...
- *Changing diapers* – here's my pet peeve; I always thought you should just wrap babies up in a garbage bag and change that once in awhile (just kidding!); that might make a distasteful task a little more bearable...

Overall, there's a refreshing, exhilarating, rich joy found in godly parenting that cannot be acquired by any other means ... if we'll just do things God's way. So, here's a question for you, as we continue today: **Does God's word guarantee that our parenting (verb) will succeed if we follow God's plan?** Consider this *third foundational principle*...

SUCCESS IN PARENTING IS MEASURED BY WHAT PARENTS DO, NOT BY WHAT THE CHILD DOES! ⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. – Proverbs 22:6 (KJV) Does this guarantee that our children will turn out perfectly ... as God planned for them? Too often, as parents, we blame ourselves for our kid's choices, when the fact is ... *God's given them a free will, too!*

Hear me clearly today: The true measure of success for Christian parents is *the parents' own character*, to the degree that we've followed God's design for parenting, *we've succeeded as parents before God*. (Not living by God's guidelines, on the other hand, would be what we call 'parental delinquency', which may or may not be our fault, depending on if we've been previously exposed to these godly principles or not.) Here's the final foundational principle for today...

A KID'S MOST SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IS THEIR PARENTS, NOT THEIR PEERS! ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working. ⁸ Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. – Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (TEV)

Though some parents may disagree, many experts (including this pastor) do agree that parents still remain the #1 influence on their children (even teens)! Because of this truth, *please know these facts:*

- If peer groups are having more influence on our kids than parents are, it's because parents have simply abdicated the parental role to the peers; there is no excuse for that... With that said, let me also say,

- Children are *taught* to be what they become ... so if parents don't spend this time in teaching, somebody else will!

Folks, God has made parenting a full-time responsibility ... and PARENTING IS A VERB! It is something we must be deliberate about; it is something we must do (an action) ... and *we must do it God's way*, if we want the blessing of our children that God has intended... I WANT TO CLOSE WITH THIS TODAY: **FOR PARENTS, DEUTERONOMY 6 IS WHERE IT'S AT!** Let me share a bit of it with you again...

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 reminds us, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working."

This is God's own definition of the parents' task; *there is no 'time out' for the parent who wants to be faithful to this very special calling...* Let's pray now and ask God to help guide us, *even over these next few weeks*, to be the adults who work with children—parents—as God calls us to be...