

Stones And Serpents

Introduction. Will Durant said, "The family is the nucleus of civilization." Parents are well-meaning; their intentions are good. They intend to give their children bread not stones, fish not serpents (Matthew 7:9-10).

"Everybody knows how to raise children, except the people who have them" (P. J. O'Rourke). We have to learn (or be reminded) how to give our children "good gifts". It has been said, "The hardest thing about having children is that they don't come with an instruction manual," but this is not entirely correct. The Bible is a pretty good manual — and we need to use it. So let's go through some instances where we give our children stones and serpents instead of bread and fish.

I. When They Ask For Our Time And Affection And Instead We Give Them Possessions

- A. "If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them and half as much money on them" (Abigail Van Buren).
- B. "Hannah went not up" in 1 Samuel 1:20-23. Children need the presence of their parents to rear them. It doesn't take a "village" to raise children, but it does take a mommy and daddy!
- C. Time slips away, so are you giving your time to your children?
 1. Are we always too busy for our children? Do we give them the personal interest they deserve? Do we give them all the gifts they ask for — but give grudgingly the most precious gift — our personal association?
 2. They need to be taught how to deal with others, how to hit and throw a baseball and softball, etc. Our children need us, not the possessions we can give them (Matthew 16:26).
- D. Our children's emotional and spiritual needs cannot be served and nurtured by material possessions.

II. When They Ask For Our Guidance And Discipline And Instead We Leave Them Alone

- A. Children need parents who have the strength to exercise consistent discipline, regardless of the cost.
- B. An unknown author remarked, "Some families can trace their ancestors back 300 years, but can't tell you where their children were last night."
 1. Parents guide and teach their children (Proverbs 4:3-4; Deuteronomy 11:18-21). What is in their little hearts is so special.
 2. Parents need the courage, will, and wisdom to correct their children (Proverbs 13:24; 29:15, 17; cp. 1 Samuel 3:13).
- C. "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children" (The Duke of Windsor, *Look*, March 5, 1957).

III. When They Ask For Spiritual Focus And Instead We Help Them Focus On The Pleasures Of The World

- A. Entertainment always reflects the morality and immorality of its society. These are some of the hardest temptations for many to overcome; parents can set the example and show them how to say no (Ephesians 5:3-7; cp. Job 1:5).
- B. Children need strong, disciplined, spiritually mature parents to serve as models and to surround them with nurturing love. "You're not a good parent, if at some point you are not an embarrassment to your children" (Malcolm Forbes, Sr.).
- C. A lot of interests in life are not wrong, but they do reveal what we are passionate about. Is it sports? is it academics? Does it help or hinder faithfulness to God?
- D. Children can and should see that Christ is first with us (Matthew 6:33). Can they see parents with the heart of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18) or Daniel (Daniel 6:10)?
- E. Educate them in Christian living, not just academics (Philippians 4:8-9). Let them see parents who actively and faithfully participate in spiritual work (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19). This will pay such good dividends!

IV. When They Ask For Compliments And Praise And Instead We Are Quick To Criticize And Belittle Them

- A. It discourages children when all they hear is negativity (Colossians 3:21).
 - 1. Children can become "discouraged" by being unnecessarily provoked, nagged, or belittled, or by being ignored and neglected.
 - 2. If we spend more time telling them what they do wrong, they will lose respect for us and a willingness to listen to us (Proverbs 18:19; cp. 16:32).
- B. Children need to be reinforced with praise, trust, attention, and affection. Treat them like you believe Psalm 127:3-5.

V. When They Ask For Order And Stability And Instead We Give Them Chaos And Unpredictability

- A. Children need the security and growth environment which comes from orderliness in the home.
- B. Some very important items that bring chaos and unpredictability:
 - 1. Inconsistent parental moral standards and expectations (Genesis 18:19). Manoah (Judges 13:8) and David (1 Kings 2:1-4) show great wisdom regarding their children.
 - 2. Conflict and divorce (Malachi 2:16; Ephesians 4:26; James 1:19). Theodore Hesburgh wrote, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." I want your friends to be jealous of how solid your marriage is!

Conclusion. We will never fulfill Proverbs 22:6 if we, as parents, are not living the way we should. So be a godly parent so that when your children ask for bread and fish you don't give them stones and serpents.

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