

# Purposeful Parenting

**Introduction.** Columnist Ellen Goodman wrote a powerful editorial on the challenges of parenting today, a portion of which follows:

Sooner or later; most Americans become card-carrying members of the counterculture. I'm not talking about joining a protest. I'm not talking about becoming a hippie with beads or a guitar. I'm not talking about recreating Woodstock and playing Jimi Hendrix music. All you need to join is a child.

At some point between childbirth classes and PTA, it becomes clear that one of your main jobs as a parent is to counter the culture. What the media delivers to children by the masses, you're expected to rebut one at a time. But the call for "parental responsibility" is increasing in direct proportion to the irresponsibility of the marketplace. Parents are expected to protect their children from an increasingly hostile environment. Are the kids being sold junk food? Just say no. Is TV bad? Turn it off. Are there messages about sex, drugs, violence all around? Counter the culture.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a research associate at the Institute for American Values, found this out in interviews with middle-class parents. "A common complaint I heard from parents was their sense of being overwhelmed by the culture. They felt more helpless than their parents." "Parents," she notes, "see themselves in a struggle for the hearts and minds of their own children." It isn't that they can't say no. It's that there's so much more to say no to.

Once the chorus of cultural values was full of ministers, teachers, neighbors, and leaders. They demanded more conformity, but offered more support. Now the cultural messengers can be quite unsavory. Parents are considered "responsible" only if they are successful in their resistance.

It's what makes child-raising harder. It's why parents feel more isolated. It's not just that American families have less time with their kids, it's that we have to spend more of this time doing battle with our own culture. It's like trying to get your kids to eat their green beans after they've been told all day about the wonders of a Milky Way bar.

In light of all these ideas, let's explore six ways that you can make your parenting more purposeful, and hopefully more successful.

## ***I. Put God in His Rightful Place***

- A. The key to purposeful parenting is a personal commitment to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Psalm 127:1).
- B. This verse isn't saying you don't build your home — you do. Rather, it's a warning against the foolishness of trying to build your home alone.
- C. It's our willingness to cooperate with God that brings grand results, at least it did in Bible times (Exodus 14:26; Joshua 8:18). We need to work together in our family with God, and not receive the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1).

## ***II. Let Love Be a Way of Life***

- A. No home can be healthy without love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 14:1). It's the force that holds everything together.

- B. The basis of love in the home is first formed by loving God, and then loving our fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40), of seeing each other as more important (Isaiah 1:17; Philippians 2:3-4).
- C. Once this twofold foundation of love is laid, then loving spouses and loving children flows naturally in purposeful parenting (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4).

### **III. Be Intentional**

- A. “Intentional” is kind of a new buzzword and it means “done on purpose; deliberate.” Listen closely to the several words used by the apostle Paul in his Ephesians 6:1-4 passage:
  - 1. Obey: to follow the commands or guidance of.
  - 2. Honor: reverence, profound respect mingled with love, devotion, or awe.
  - 3. Exasperate: to stir up purposely.
  - 4. Training: to form by instruction, discipline or drill; to teach so as to make fit, qualified, or proficient.
  - 5. Instruction: gentle or friendly reproof; counsel or warning against fault or oversight.
- B. Raising really good children and future members of God’s kingdom is an intentional effort.
  - 1. You don’t have to be a great parent to have a great kid. You can be a good parent and have a great kid. However, the chances of being a bad parent and raising a great kid are not great.
  - 2. Jeroboam, the first king of the divided kingdom of Israel, influenced a long line of kings to do evil (1 Kings 15:25-26). He was intentional in being evil, and the results were as expected.
- C. As parents, you’re the deciders of values, and your children will pick up on those values early in their lives. Those values will produce habits, and those habits will lead to feelings. Intentional values, habits, and feelings that work toward godliness will produce children who are not disobedient (Acts 26:19).

### **IV. Manage Well**

- A. The marketplace teaches us that success or failure in any business or venture depends on effective management. Effective management isn’t doing things right; it’s doing the right things.
- B. The same is true for families. Dad, the Scriptures inform us that managing is your responsibility (1 Timothy 3:4). Be a good manager of:
  - 1. Time: an enormous amount of time can be misused with entertainment and recreation, instead of developing spirituality in the home (Ephesians 5:15-16).
  - 2. Assets: overindulgence and a reluctance to sacrificially help others and give to God can lead to a preoccupation with wealth (Luke 12:15; 2 Samuel 24:24).
  - 3. Opportunities: taking the family to worship, Bible study, gospel meetings, and special events can foster a heart that’s devoted to God (Psalm 27:4).
  - 4. Holiness: protecting the hearts of your children by shielding them from immodesty and bad language will produce purity (2 Corinthians 7:1).

## **V. Take Time for Each Other**

- A. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a wonderful text, and the key words are:
  - 1. Impress: like a printing press imprints the characters of letters on paper, you impress a love for God on your children.
  - 2. Talk: conversations.
  - 3. Sit: when you're together.
  - 4. Walk: or drive in the car.
  - 5. Lie down: at bedtime.
  - 6. Get up: at breakfast.
  - 7. Tie them on your hands: display them around your home.
  - 8. Bind them on your foreheads: tie a string around your finger.
- B. This process is a full-time job that uses every opportunity to communicate the love of God.
  - 1. A child must learn the character of God to grow a relationship with God (Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 97:2). All of our Bible class teachers need to remember this.
  - 2. In a real sense, all parents are home schoolers, except they instruct in the most important aspects of life.
- C. Let's also make sure that husbands and wives are taking time for each other (1 Peter 3:7). They need to build their relationship right along with the relationship with the children. Neglect will always catch up to you down the road.

## **VI. Set a Good Example**

- A. In Titus 2:7, young men were exhorted to be "a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility." Don't think this can't apply to young men as fathers or to young women as mothers!
- B. The Bible reveals such a rich level of character in the people of God. It would be regrettable if we didn't take this chance to point you toward a few of the good illustrations of mothers and fathers.
  - 1. Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:24-28).
    - a) Hannah's faith is one of the most inspiring in the Bible. One of the most notable things Hannah does is offer her son Samuel to the service of God by dedicating him to the temple.
    - b) While we may not be setting our children to work in temples from a young age, what we can learn from Hannah is having a persistent faith and a heart willing to surrender everything to God and seek His will for her child.
  - 2. Joseph, the father of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).
    - a) Imagine your wife one day telling you she's pregnant with a child that's not your own, and then to make matters worse tells you God impregnated her.
    - b) Any normal husband would probably be conflicted whether to throw a wife like that into prison or into a mental asylum, but not Joseph. He trusted in his wife and importantly in God when things made the least sense and faithfully raised a young Jesus as if He were his own.

3. Abraham, the father of Isaac (Genesis 22:2).
  - a) Sure Abraham had a lot of missteps, but he also persevered through all the failures and stuck it out until God's promise of Isaac was fulfilled.
  - b) How often do we easily give up on God's promise not just to have children but even to see God's will happen in their lives? And what would you have done if God asked you to sacrifice your child? Abraham is a true example of faith.
4. Eunice, the mother of Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5).
  - a) Eunice does not have a Bible narrative of her own, but we do know that Timothy was a young man whom Paul trusted and believed in so much.
  - b) Paul attributed at least part of Timothy's faithfulness in Christ to his mother and grandmother. It's critical for what dwells in us to dwell in them too.

**Conclusion.** Scrutinize your family values. Anything other than Jesus in His rightful place in your home is too weak for permanent cohesion. A personal commitment to Christ, backed up with positive examples and living in agreement with biblical principles, should be the family's goal.

Finally, keep in mind that these guidelines will help your family be righteous. It's likely to work — but nothing's guaranteed. However, what we do as the saints of God is not just to "make things better;" we're doing it because it's the will of God.

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