

Classic Christian Writings:

Some Christian parents live under the mistaken assumption that if they are godly their children will also be godly. While personal example is a necessary ingredient to raising godly children, it is by no means the "bottom line." Sufficient biblical example of godly men who raised ungodly children should cause us great caution in making such an assumption. So what is the answer? Where do we begin, beyond our own commitment to personal godliness?

What does "godly seed" actually mean? An answer can be found by looking at how God's word contrasts godliness with worldliness. For example: "It [the grace of God] teaches us to say No to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12). This kind of stark biblical contrast between godliness and worldliness should be of great value in helping us make wise judgments as we endeavor to raise godly children. We are either raising godly children or worldly children. That which is worldly is not godly.

First and foremost, God Himself is much concerned that we raise godly children and commands us to do so. He is seeking godly offspring (Mal. 2:15).

Secondly, while godliness versus worldliness may or may not be a heaven-or-hell issue, it certainly is an issue with regard to the worth of our children's lives here on this earth. The eleventh Kingdom of God parable taught by Christ teaches that our lives are being recorded and measured in terms of "servanthood." The essence of our children's lives will be summed up in a personal accounting before Christ, hopefully with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:23). It is worthy of note that "Demas, because he loved this world" (2 Tim. 4:10) deserted the Apostle Paul. If we don't raise godly children then at the very best we could only count on their lives being of no use to Jesus Christ on this earth, deserting His work because of their love of the world.

At worst, failure to raise godly children might result in it being a heaven-or-hell issue. There is good biblical evidence to indicate that we may be living in the end-time generation that will see the return of Jesus Christ. If this is indeed so then we can expect an environment such as never has been seen before. Possible hints to the nature of this environment can be found surrounding two other significant biblical events.

When God was preparing to deliver His people out of Egypt, Satan's response was to foster the killing of the children. And again when God was preparing to send Jesus the first time, Satan orchestrated the killing of the children. Could it be that the end-time generation, who will witness Christ's second coming, will suffer a similar form of Satanically inspired attack? How will Satan do it? He is the prince of this world, with emphasis on "world." Thousands upon thousands of young lives are being wasted and destroyed by this world. Will we raise our children to survive it? Are we raising godly children or worldly children?

Where Do We Start?

We should first settle in our own hearts the issue of the absolute importance of godliness in our own lives and then commit ourselves to it. "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Godliness is worth everything! What we are, and have committed ourselves to, will be the foundation and springboard from which we can effectively train our children.

Notice God's Word says, "Train yourself to be godly." Children won't just absorb our godliness and by that means become godly. They must be trained to be godly, just as we must train ourselves to be godly. We are commanded to go and make disciples. Is it safe to say that our children should be the first of our disciples? If that is so, keep in mind that making disciples is more than just teaching. It is also apprenticing. Children don't just "come up" by themselves in the Lord. They are "brought up."

Is it possible to be in the world but not of the world? Jesus was. He related to those in the world yet He was not tainted by anything in the world. Our goal is not to raise weirdos who can't relate to the world, but to raise children who, like Jesus, are godly and righteous but can relate to the people of this world in order to share Christ with them.

What does it mean to be in the world but not of the world? The Bible says, "Do not love the world or anything

in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

And again, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). If we believe these Scriptures we should be as radical as we need to be in order to fulfill our commitment to Christ--radically committed in our own lives, and radically committed in that which we impart to our children.

Our children do not need a "taste of the world" in order to exist in the world. In fact, God says "to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Are we keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world? Are we keeping our children from being polluted by the world? We should give our children the wonderful experience of godliness and at the same time fiercely shield them from the pollution of the world.

Basics For Raising Godly Children

We face tremendous pressures to satisfy our children's desires with things of the world. We are inundated by it: entertainment, activities, possessions, etc. It is not to say that all of these things are in and of themselves evil, but it is to ask, "What is the source of our and our children's fulfillment?" If parents give in to their children's--or their own--cravings, the result will be children who will look to the world for fulfillment instead of looking to Christ. Churches, in turn, are then pressured to bring in worldly things in an attempt to entertain worldly children. This should not be! Our perspective should be from the Bible to the world, not from the world to the church.

True fulfillment comes from godly relationships and servanthood. One of the reasons children cast off restraint is that they have no vision for servanthood--they just don't see what the church is supposed to be doing. We can drag our children to church and command them to sit still but utterly fail to impart to them a vision of serving God together as a family.

We need to give our children a vision and experience in servanthood. We need to show them how they can touch someone else's life, how to be others oriented. This gives meaning and fulfillment to life. Without it, children will look somewhere else and the world is just waiting with hollow and destructive promises of fulfillment. It's not just saying no to worldliness but giving them experience in true godliness.

The next basic for raising godly children is to protect and deliver our children from peer pressure. Observation and discussion with our adolescent children will reveal that this is a major for them. It is challenging for us to keep the balance, but here are some things that might help.

1. Never sacrifice your children out of fear of offending or hurting someone else. We are not mean people and it would certainly distress us to offend someone. Yet we should have the resolve and courage to say no when the situation calls for it. Peer pressure from worldly playmates or worldly homes will affect the lives of our children.

At the same time we should train our children in kindness. Our children should never say, or be tempted to say, "You're worldly, so I can't play with you or come over to your house."

As our children grow older they will be looking to get jobs to help with college or whatever. We should know their bosses and their fellow employees. There are places where we should not allow them to get jobs because of the peer pressure there. We may trust they would be able to handle the pressure, but why expose them to it when we don't have to? It is not wrong to be a super-protective parent in this regard.

2. We can meet our children's need for companionship at home. We should develop a knack for and habit of "hanging out" with our children. When they are little we play and wrestle with them. After they get older another scenario develops. The day is done and we're just about ready to fall asleep and they come in saying, "Dad, mom, I need to talk." Talk. Meet their need for companionship.

3. Develop a servant's heart in them. Servanthood is the opposite of self-centeredness. A self-centered child is very vulnerable to peer pressure.

4. Watch the attitude and motivation with which we minister to our children. Our perspective should be

essentially what's good for them, not according to what we think but from God's perspective. In other words, the direct goal of the parent is not his children's happiness; it is rather to give them the things that God says will lead to happiness.

5. Keep in mind that we develop them from the inside, not from the outside. Develop their hearts rather than just giving them rules. Younger children, of course, need more rules; but the goal is not to place a burdensome yoke upon them which they will only shake off when they get older. The goal is to develop internal controls in their own lives, born out of their own real and deep love for Jesus Christ.

Other parents may have said to you, "Just wait until your children are teen-agers. All teen-agers go through a time of rebellion." That isn't what the Bible says, although it is true for children who are governed only by external rules. When they can cast them off, they will; and they will be gone. How much better to give them the internal character and convictions with which they can make the right decisions of life.

Children need to gain experience in making right decisions. We can let them make all their own decisions as long as they are right decisions. We may think, "They need to make their own mistakes." They will soon enough. In the meantime we should give them all the experience possible in making right decisions. This is the apprenticeship aspect of making disciples of our children. The goal is to develop character on the inside that will help them make the right kinds of decisions when the needs arise.

The time will come when our control of our children will lessen, as it should. God has designed it that way. Ultimately our children must decide for themselves whether or not they're going to serve God, whether they're going to give themselves to godliness. We can't make that decision for them. We can only raise them with the experience and foundation of godliness so that they can make the right decision.

From The Gospel Truth. Used by permission of the author Ted Hoit, pastor living in Hayden, Idaho.

If you are a parent who has found helpful directives in this fine article, write to Herald of His Coming for the continuation of this article, which space does not permit us to print here. It is "Pitfalls In Raising Godly Children." Ask for Newsletter Number 32.