

Growing Kids God's Way - Appendix 1 - Parent and God Factor

How were you parented? From time to time, reflecting on the past can shed light on the present. For many, childhood can seem distant and unrelated to present circumstances. After all, many years have gone by since you were subject to the rule of your own parents. Yet, one does not easily escape the habit-forming attitudes of childhood.

We have all heard, and you may have said yourself, "When I become a parent, I won't do that to my children." Or, if you sensed deficiencies in your upbringing, you might have said something like, "When I become a parent, I'm going to do. . . with my kids." How have personal pledges such as these worked their way into your parenting? Unfortunately, many adults parent in response to their own unresolved childhood fears, conflicts, and disappointments. They do this by projecting their own fears and disillusionment with life onto their kids. They create strategies that fit comfortably with their personal pain threshold. The pain and pleasure of childhood can powerfully, yet silently, shape our inventory of needs when it comes to raising our children.

For example, if the growing-up years were pleasant, there is a strong tendency to employ training techniques similar to those by which you were raised. If your childhood and teen years were stressful, the tendency is to swing to the opposite extreme of your parents' parenting methods when rearing your own children. For example, parents brought up under unfair, restrictive, or even abusive methods often unknowingly move toward permissive parenting, allowing their children to become self-centered. These parents in many ways become more concerned about their children's feelings than about their actions. They elevate psychological health above moral health, and any standard of right and wrong is subject to how their children feel, not what they do.

In contrast, when parents find that their unhappy childhood resulted from a permissive upbringing, they often become very strict, especially if they feel the lack of guidance was a great handicap to them. For example, those who lived morally relaxed lives in their youth will often overcompensate with their own children by becoming overly protective and sheltering. These parents find their security in control.

In both cases, there is a driving force to change the status quo. So what happens? Permissive/child-centered parents fear inhibiting the child, so they go to the extreme of creating an environment of unrestrained freedom. This results in an under-controlled child. Authoritarian parents fear spoiling their child, so they see their salvation in the power of rules and limitations. Their methods usually produce an over-controlled Child.

The problem is further complicated when personalities and parenting styles within the home clash. If one parent is easygoing and flexible, and the other parent is structured and predictable, unhealthy conflict tends to prevail in the home. A balanced style of parenting, where the two styles of parenting meet somewhere in the middle, is nowhere to be found. Rather than becoming closer in their approach to parenting, these parents usually drift

further apart. This happens because each one considers it his or her duty, in the name of love, to compensate for the other's weaknesses. Instead of complementing each other by drawing from each other's strengths, they find themselves at war, using each other's weaknesses to shoot bullets at each other. The result? Divided leadership produces disloyal troops, and everyone, including the children, lead with the battle cry of, "Divide and Conquer!"

Parenting Extremes

It is interesting to listen to parenting perspectives. The permissive parent looks at the authoritarian parent and says, "I do not want to be like that mother or father. They're too strict!" The authoritarian parent looks at the permissive household and says, "I do not want my children acting like that. They're out of control!" Unfortunately, parents do tend to move to these extremes. The permissive parent who controls too little and the authoritarian parent who controls too much both deprive their children of basic skills necessary for healthy adolescence. Let's take a closer look at each parenting style.

Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian parenting was the norm for the first sixty years of this century and was most closely associated with the Judeo/Christian ethics. Because it was predominantly concerned with restraining evil, authoritarianism paid little attention to elevating good. That means there was a greater emphasis placed on what children should not do than on what they should do. Parenting by restraint resulted in the attitude that the ends justify the means, or one can do anything to bring about conformity to societal rules. During the reign of authoritarianism, social engineering was the task of parents, neighbors, churches, and teachers, but not of the State. Although children typically conformed and did virtuous acts, they did so out of the fear of reproof, not because of the love of goodness. The child heard, "You will do it or else." The "or else" became the motivation for right behavior, not a resident principle of the heart.

Permissive Parenting

Since the late 1960s, permissive theories have dominated the American culture. Permissive parenting is not concerned with suppressing evil or elevating good. At the core of this theory is the concern over creating the right environment for the child, not behavioral results.

Parenting arouses many different emotions. The emotions of love, joy, peace, contentment, and confidence are easily matched by the emotions of frustration, disappointment, and discouragement, and on some days, despair. Parenting to achieve all the right emotions is not the genesis of child training. Yet such a belief is the common denominator of permissive parents. For them, child-rearing is reduced to avoiding all negative emotions and pursuing all positive ones. Thus, right and wrong training are measured by how parents think their child feels rather than by the end product—their child's behavior. Feelings belonging to both parent and child become the basis of nurturing and their ethics. If the child feels happy, the parent is satisfied. If the child feels sad, then the parent works

to create an environment that will eliminate his sadness.

We believe that both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are wrong and are detrimental to the welfare of a child. That is why this manual endeavors to guide parents according to the basic rules of biblical ethics.

Only By The Grace Of God

The duty of Christian parents to instruct their children in the knowledge of God cannot be achieved apart from His grace. We know this in our own family. Next to our computer screen is an Easter picture of our grandchildren. Ashley, then seven years old, has her arms stretched out across the shoulders of her siblings and cousins.

At times, I look at that picture and think and reflect on my own grandparents. It was nearly a century ago when, as children, each of them found the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. From those spiritual roots, our family's Christian heritage began. As adults, my grandparents passed on the message to their children who in turn passed it on to their own kids. We then taught our own children about Jesus, and they in turn are now actively passing on their faith to our grandchildren. By God's grace, Christianity has followed our bloodline for five generations.

As a parent, you want many things for your child, but the most important issue must be your child's salvation. You may wonder what you can do to influence your child's decision. "Isn't salvation a personal issue?" you ask. "I certainly do not have the power to make it happen." This is true. As the Bible says, salvation occurs "by grace alone, through faith alone" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet many parents wrongly conclude that dependency upon grace means they should relinquish all responsibility or "let go and let God." The belief follows this logic: Why should parents bother to develop the moral character and conduct of their children if grace and salvation, the supreme goals, are not the direct result of moral training? As the Bible states, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His (God's) sight by observing the law..." (Romans 3:20).

The simplest answer to that question is that God requires the training of children. Proverbs 22:6 calls parents to "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 23:13a says, "*Do not withhold correction from a child.*" The New Testament command is found in Ephesians 6:4. It reads, "*And you fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*"

In his essays on the duties of a parent, the nineteenth-century English cleric John C. Ryle warned parents to beware of the delusion that parents can do nothing for their children—that they must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still. Pastor Ryle understood the importance of early training and passionately exhorted parents to participate in the communication of God's grace by opening the child's mind to and directing his ways in God's moral law, which is reflective of God's Character. To learn God's Character is to learn the way of God. In this way, children are brought to a knowledge of God.

Of the various means by which God communicates His grace, three deserve our attention here. First, there is a common grace given to all mankind. Its benefits are experienced by the whole human race without discrimination. For instance, God brings refreshing rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.

Second, there is sanctifying grace. God's grace flows to families through the sanctifying grace of believing spouses and parents. That is, when Mom and Dad have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, children receive the overflow of God's grace as it is poured out on their parents. The blessing is multiplied by and through each subsequent generation, as long as that generation stays aligned with God's redemptive Character.

Yet we know our children cannot live off of their parent's blessings but must obtain their own. This is done through regeneration grace, that which comes at the point of personal salvation.

The word "salvation" above is the all-inclusive word of the gospel. It brings together all the redemptive acts and processes—justification, redemption, grace, and forgiveness. The message of redemption is God giving mankind a second chance to know His Love. Like adults, children may possess a knowledge of God, but may not know that God's love is personal, and that the salvation He offers is also personal. It is an individualize salvation that no one can claim for another. Every person, from the time of Adam and Eve to the most recent baby born, must decide for him or herself to choose or reject God's love and the redemption fulfilled in Jesus. Introducing children to God's character of Love is one of surest ways of introducing children to the redemptive Love and Grace of God.

This truth is basic to our entire presentation. No morality or conformity to the moral law can be acceptable to God, except that which is exercised in total dependence on Jesus Christ from an act of faith.