

Rearing Children—What Is True and of Good Report

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Perhaps I understand why T.S. Eliot named his famous poem “The Waste Land.” It was an apt name for the spiritual exhaustion of between-the-wars time in Europe. This spiritual wasteland continues worldwide today in man’s failure to trust in God, in his fallen idols, and in the endless seeking to fill the emptiness within the secular soul. Yet this is nothing new; the Bible is full of those turning from God and seeking after nothing—lessons still ignored.

We live in a rapidly changing world that some call the “Google Age.” It comes with a cost, for the technology changes the way our brains work. We “skim” constantly on the Internet, we “twitter,” we “Facebook,” we cannot follow complex arguments, we “decode” instead of “interpret,” and through all of this we lose critical learning skills. How do parents rear Christian children who are already products of the new electronics? Where does Biblical parenting fit into this flood of information and society’s lack of morality?

As an elder, a Bible teacher, and a physician, I know the dilemma we as parents face in rearing children to walk in purity. First, we have general ideas that most of us received from our own parents’ approaches, some good and some bad. Second, we realize that the physical ability to have children does not automatically qualify us for the task of properly training children. Third, we know that being a parent today is a difficult and often bewildering challenge because of the rapidly changing worldview and technology. Finally, there are the experts and their many books: from the old-fashioned training we received, to new psychological approaches, and even pseudo-religious teaching that equates Christian grace and love with tolerance of even wrongdoing and irresponsibility.

Christian parents must have goals and principles. They want their children to grow daily in their spiritual lives, to live in fellowship with God, and to have salvation. Realize that parenting begins with each parent’s own Christian life. Paul writes, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12, ESV). There is no way to teach purity without being trained to be pure. Children imitate what

they see. Only by the parents being examples of purity and obedience will children follow and practice the example themselves, so that the continued practice becomes in time a Christian habit.

Some steps are important for the parents: they must commit to a loving marriage; they must love their children unconditionally; they must encourage and affirm their children; they must cultivate open communications; and discipline must be corrective and not abusive. The parents should be well grounded in the faith. The children must learn as early as possible the means of having victory over sin; therefore, the parent's value system must be on open display. What does this mean? Parents are to seek their own purity and values and practice them as astutely as they teach their offspring to do. They are to limit contact to the world's allure through monitoring their own television programs and advertisements, use of the Internet, choice of literature, circle of acquaintances, business practices, and language. What they have chosen to do, so their children can be taught to do—again by the parents' example.

We are in the world, but not of the world or open to the world. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:15-16, ESV). Are there more avenues of temptation today than in the past? There may be, but the temptation is the same. Our goal should be to imitate Christ, to keep ourselves unspotted by the world, and to teach others. Many years ago I was told by a Bible teacher, "Don't just talk the walk, but walk the talk!" As an adolescent, I already recognized the hackneyed phrase. But he was right. Only by doing so will we protect our children and ourselves from the world's horrible dangers: addiction, contagious diseases, lax morality, murder, abortion, suicide, dishonesty, selfishness, and apostasy. The world is not a good place to survive in or to be lost within.

This is how and what you teach your children by your attitude and example of purity: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8, NASB). So, walk the talk, hand in hand with your children! Pray for them, and let them see you doing so for their sake and yours. Keep up with the world's changes, but do not let them change you from being a pure Christian.