

Parenthood (2): How Do We Learn It?

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One of the ironies of parenthood is that much of a child's crucial development occurs at a young age – when parents are themselves immature. Children cannot be put on hold until parents acquire the wisdom of age. So how do parents learn to raise children without first having raised them? It seems to be a catch-22.

Many parents buy into this idea, especially when they've had a problem with a child. If someone either without children or with younger children offers advice, the reaction often is, "How could you possibly know how to handle a situation like this? You've not been through it." Someone, a young person in fact, made a sensible observation some years ago before I had children of my own. He said, "It's not that people without children don't know how to handle them. The challenge is to carry through with what you know once you become a parent."

This is a maxim, a general truth which allows for exceptions. While some aspects of raising children are gained by experience, I believe a greater portion of parental insight and ability comes from somewhere else: namely, the Bible.

First, the Scriptures tell us what kind of character God expects us to have as His children. Since God is the Ultimate Parent, it follows that when we adopt His traits we are thus equipping ourselves to be good parents. The key, then, to being a good parent at a young age is immersion in God's character.

Secondly, the Bible tells us what kind of characteristics our children should have. There are certain attitudes and behaviors which are unacceptable in children or anyone else, and we are thus able to critically analyze our children's character and make corrections where necessary.

Thirdly, the Bible gives specific insight on raising children both by example and by direct precept. Surely God has not left us without sufficient guidance on such a critical subject.

Young parents need not despair over their inexperience. Experience is not the primary reference on child-raising; *God's word is*. But having said that, it would be unwise not to learn from those who have been down the road of parenthood (Tit 2:3-5). Let's not waste the wisdom of our elders. Seek out those who have raised faithful children and ask their advice. Chances are, given the performance of some parents, they are dying to give it.

Raising *good* children doesn't take a degree in child psychology but a mother and father who are majoring in Christianity.