
POSITIVE PARENTING

Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ADVANTAGING YOUR CHILD FOR LIFE

*“Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given to me are for signs and wonders...”
~Isaiah 8:18*

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs imaginable. It calls for love beyond measure, patience of untold proportions, and energy equal to that of professional sports players.

One of the most draining things about parenting is the lack of clear instruction about what exactly a parent should do. Nobody seems to know. We have lots of thoughts about what we should have done, but few ideas about what to do next. Being a parent—a good parent—is no simple matter. As much as we would like to cling to our romanticized, *pre-children* notions that “*doing our best and just loving them*” will make us adequate to the task, reality (now that we have kids) won’t let us rest comfortably there.

Somehow, deep down, we know we want to do better by them...

Instead of hopeful thoughts about what we’re going to do as parents, most of us regret things that we have done since being parents. Why? Why did parenting turn out to be so much more difficult that we imagined it would be? How come no one prepared us for this?

Fortunately, the Bible—that ageless handbook on life—offers us a complete job description, along with numerous points of guidance for the parent who truly wants to see his or her child advantaged for life. Let’s look at what the Bible has to say about our role in our child’s life.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

It helps to have a basic backdrop for parenting—something to keep in mind while we’re trying to deal with the specific, day-to-day aspects of being a mom or dad. Think of these as the bigger

realities that may explain why parenting is a bit more complicated than we may have first imagined:

1. Our part in making kids is fairly easy, quite quick and entirely enjoyable. Our role in raising them is extremely hard, seemingly endless and often disagreeable. One act ends up requiring countless activities; a single romantic evening leads to hundreds of hugely unromantic nights.
2. We are not alone in the begetting/raising children equation. Neither our children nor we “just happened”; a Creator created us. Children are treasures the Lord entrusts to us for a season. They are not just the product of (passionate) evolution. They are not ours to do with as we (alone) think best.
3. Consequently, parents have a dual set of responsibilities: one set of obligations and privileges to our children—to provide and care for them; the other set to God—to follow His instructions for that care.

THREE CALLINGS

Most jobs have both specific duties and general areas of responsibility. For instance, a customer service rep for a software company is supposed to answer questions, follow procedures, make reports, etc., but the whole point of those particular activities is to care for the customers. If the rep concentrates on caring for the customer, the rep’s duties will be clear—even without a detailed manual for all the possible scenarios he or she is likely to face. In the same way, these three purposes for parents will help us know what to do/say no matter what the age of our kids:

1. Personally pursue the way of God—as an example for our kids—and, thereby, produce blessings for them (see Proverbs 13:22; 14:26; 20:7). How we, ourselves, choose to live, is one of the biggest factors determining how our kids end up living.
2. Patiently teach, instruct, and explain to our children how life really works—contrasting life as God meant it to be with life (physical, mental, spiritual) as the world lives it (see Proverbs 14:12; Isaiah 55:7-9).
3. Provide lessons about life’s consequences when our children disregard what they have been taught—assuring them through consistent boundaries and corrections that they are responsible for their choices (see Proverbs 1:30-33; Galatians 6:7,22:8;).

ADVANTAGED CHILDREN

The point of being a good parent isn't so that we can feel good about ourselves—or have a fallback position when our kids make foolish choices (*“Hey, I raised ‘em right; it’s not my fault”*). The only legitimate goal for good parenting is to advantage our children for the rest of their lives, giving them extra bits of understanding and insight—about themselves, life and others—to insure their lifelong fulfillment.

Parents cannot guarantee their children's circumstances (occupational, financial, marital) for life, but we can *almost* guarantee the inner quality of their lives by preparing them to handle whatever circumstances they will face. Our counsel and instruction shape their thoughts, feelings, and will. Parenting is essentially passing along the lessons, insights, and understandings we have arrived at over a lifetime. It's more than getting them off to college or launching them in a career; it's giving them an invaluable head start on life.

Parenting is proactive, not reactive. Even the consequences we administer, as a result of wrong things kids say and do, are supposed to be teaching them about the future. We teach them to say “Please”, to share, to stay close to us in a crowd, to look both ways from the curb, to call us if their plans change, to use a napkin, to clean their room, and brush their teeth because we want the very best for them.

That's our first great hint about parenting. It is for the kids' good, not ours. That means it will be inconvenient for us, but it also gives us a fabulous touchstone—questions we can ask ourselves whenever we do not know what to do: *“What is in my child's best interests for the future? What lesson will they learn from me through this?”*

And remember, God came up with this idea. He wants it to work, and He will help us far more than we imagine if we just ask. There is no better plan in the entire world for raising our children than for us to be the ones doing it. When we get discouraged, feel like quitting, or have an inevitable meltdown, it's nice to know we weren't the ones who came up with this plan. We can consult with the One who did.