

Investing in the Spiritual Well-being of Our Children

"If I had those days to live over again, I would give a good deal more time just to be with my children, not necessarily always doing things for them or with them, but just to be there. Such memories linger long in little hearts and help condition them for stormy days ahead," so wrote V. Raymond Edman, a one-time President of Wheaton College, USA.

A Tragedy: Incredible but Often True

Edman had earlier related how shocked he was when he talked to a son of an evangelical leader. Edman began by saying to him, "You know how highly I regard your father!" The son immediately retorted, "Who is my father?" He continued, "He doesn't have any time for me". According to Edman's observation, this was not an unusual case. It was Edman's considered opinion that even godly "Samuel allowed himself to become too busy in religious activities to give adequate attention to his own boys. Eli had been both judge and high priest in Israel - too many responsibilities for any one man - and when Samuel came to maturity, he attempted to carry the same unbearable and unnecessary burden. The result was that his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8:3).

A Worthwhile Investment

Edman counsels: "We parents would do well to consider whether or not fewer responsibilities in God's service would not make us more efficient and at the same time give us more evenings at home, more time with the Word for ourselves and around the family altar".

He concludes: 'Children are the heritage of the Lord. They are the greatest investment God has ever given anyone. Our part is to devote more interest, attention and devotion to them than to our investments or industry and our multiplied service in the church. Investing in our children will bring us the highest rates of interest in time and in eternity".

Much Food for Thought

The above are excerpts from an article entitled: "Are we serving the church but losing our children?" and is found in the book, *For Families Only*, J. Allan Peterson, Editor. Edman has given me much food for thought and caused me to reorder my priorities in some areas. The danger is that we may serve the church and lose our children.

It Costs to Invest

Many parents will not hesitate to give their children costly presents, but consider it a "waste of time" or unimportant to give children their presence. Time is costly and many men do not wish to 'waste" much of it on children, even their own. But Jesus did. When his disciples rebuked those who were bringing little children to him, Jesus was indignant and out of that indignation comes the famous verse:

"Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them,
for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Mark 10:13-14

Jesus took time off in the midst of a busy schedule to play with the children. Our Lord Jesus, who evaluates people from the long term perspective knows that there couldn't be a better use of one's time and energy.

When, Where and How of Spiritual Instruction

It takes work to build the family devotion and it hasn't been easy. One needs to adapt as one's children grow. According to an authority:

"It is not a matter of spending long hours at the altar (of family worship). It is a matter of a few of a few minutes, regularly, unhurriedly, and intelligently devoted to worshipping God."

When my children were preschoolers, it was fairly easy for us to have at least two meals together. I found meal times excellent times for family devotions. A professor of mine at seminary always read a chapter of God's Word before each meal with his family. The Bible was central in his family. Now that my children go to school at different times, we can manage only one meal together as a family. It is dinner time. With my children being very young (7,6 and 3), we read only a verse or two each time. We try to inculcate a love for God's Word. Whenever possible, we encourage the memorization of God's Word. Children, including preschoolers can, do understand and can memorize God's Word in its simplicity and perspicuity (2 Timothy 3:15). A little here, a little there was a method used in teaching children, inculcating a little at a time (c.f., Isaiah 28:10,13). I encourage my children to read whenever possible. Each may take turn to pray. The prayer need not be very lengthy nor grammatically perfect. What's important is sincerity, simplicity and reverence in prayer.

The responsibility of bringing our children up in the fear and admonition may not be relegated to the church. Sunday School can be a good supplement to spiritual training in the home. As Lois E. LeBar put it in *Family Devotions with School-Age Children*:

Only in the home
can problems be dealt with when they arise.

Only in the home
can children see living models of Christ
reflecting Him in the midst of daily living.

Only in the home
are there time and experience enough
to mold human nature into Christian character.

Having no models to copy from and having been thrust into models ourselves, our tasks as Christian parents are made doubly difficult. But bless the Lord, if we humble ourselves and recognise our inadequacy, He will grant us grace to fulfill our responsibilities of bringing up our children in His fear and

admonition (James 4:6). We surely need the Lord's help in this area. We surely need to work hard at it (c.f., 1 Corinthians 15:10).

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