

# The Family Friend

*A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.*

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## **What We Would Do If We Were Starting Out As Parents**

By Norman and Ann Bales

**Editor's Note:** This material originally appeared in 2002, so some consideration of those time-frame references will need to be taken into account. Also, it was first divided into three installments. It will appear in the FF in two. Some editing has been necessary.

According to Psalm 127: 3, "Children are a heritage from the Lord." (2) We are providing the parents of our newly born children an opportunity to commit themselves to the formidable task of bringing up their children in ".... training and instruction of the Lord" as Paul encourages us to do in Ephesians 6:4. Sometimes we wonder what we would do if we were new parents today. Norman remembers a day in February of 1961, when he sat on a bench in the hall just outside the delivery room at King's Daughters Hospital in Temple, Texas and through those thin walls he heard the first

cries of our firstborn son. At that moment he became a daddy and wondered how on earth he was ever going to handle a responsibility like that.

Ann had a much harder job as she was giving birth to our first-born son. For the first few days after delivery she spent a lot of time learning to breast-feed this new little son. She also spent a lot of time taking sitz baths so she could sit down in a chair without a pillow. In those days (forty-one years ago) a new mother spent several days in the hospital. After we got home she realized why. You at least got some sleep and the nurses would bring the baby to you to nurse and come get him when he was finished. Ann took advantage of that concept by teaching Norman that this was his job.

We think today's parents have a tougher job than we did. The world is a much harsher place to live than it was in 1961. Today's world is dirtier, colder, meaner, more secular and materialistic than the world we brought our son into in 1961. But we don't believe that it is impossible to raise Godly children in our world today. If it were, surely God wouldn't let this old world stand. And everything is not so negative as you might imagine. James Dobson

gets 6,000 letters a day from mothers and father who want to raise their children in a two parent family where love prevails.

### **Thinking About the Challenge**

So what can we recommend to today's parents? We don't have a cookbook formula that's guaranteed to make your children turn out right. Nobody does. But you can give a child some advantages. It's kind of like coaching sports. The best coach in the world can't win football games because he doesn't play a single down on the field. But a coach can teach, a coach can motivate, a coach can encourage, a coach can discipline and in the end a well-coached team with mediocre talent will probably beat a poorly coached team with great talent. A parent functions like a coach. Take note of God's description of Abraham's work as a father in Genesis 18:19 "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Abraham was given the responsibility of directing his

children and his household to keep the way of the Lord. How do you do that?

### **Some Specifics**

What would our priorities be? Would we change our parenting styles? Would the life outcomes of our children be different? Of course those last two questions are unanswerable, but in the process of going through this mental exercise we came up with a list of specific priorities of parenting. We thought they were worth sharing. They include:

#### **Spiritual Leadership**

Spirituality involves that dimension of our lives that we retain after life on earth is done. Since that is the most important dimension of our lives as parents we need to lead the way in setting the spiritual tone for the family. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Paul said, "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." Paul assumes that Christian fathers encourage, comfort and urge their children to live lives worthy of God. It's a given.

#### **Commitment**

If we were starting over we would make it a regular practice to review the level of our own commitment. And we would not only do that for our children's benefit; we would also do it for ourselves. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is

in you -- unless, of course, you fail the test? The children you bring into the world need to see an example. They need a role model. We were somewhat disappointed with former NBA star, Charles Barkley several years ago, when he said that it wasn't his job to be a role model for American youth. We thought and still think that a man, who is admired up to by the youth of America because of athletic ability, owes something back to the public that put him where he is. A part of that includes being the kind of person that other young people can look up to. Actually when you compare "Sir Charles" to some of today's pampered superstars, he looks like a knight in shining armor. Later we learned that we had only heard a television sound bite from the Barkley interview. When he disclaimed the need to be a role model for children, he also said, "Parents should be the most significant role model for their children." On that score, he was absolutely correct. If we were starting out as parents today, we would heed his advice and choose to be more conscious about the effect the life style choices we make might have on our children.

#### **A Good Marriage**

When Carl Brecheen and Paul Faulkner started conducting marriage seminars around the country in the seventies, they deliberately decided that they would not make parenting issues a major topic of concern in those programs. They said, "The best thing you can do for your children is to have a good marriage." So they focused on marriage enrichment. It's no secret that many children stray from their raising and there are many reasons that

happens. Sometimes it may be a negative reaction to parental hypocrisy. At other times the parents may have been either too strict or too lax in their discipline, but no one strays off in a negative pattern and no one turns away from God because of their parents healthy relationship. We've never heard of anyone who felt they were cheated because their parents get along so well with each other that the children had no place in the family. We never heard of it because it doesn't happen.

#### **A Sense of History**

Perhaps you're wondering what that has to do with anything. History is a boring subject. Once a doctoral student at a major university told us he thought schools ought to abandon the teaching of history. He considered it an irrelevant subject. He thought schools could save all kinds of money by eliminating history from the curriculum.

We respectfully disagree. It is impossible to establish a spirit of identity, a sense of rootedness, a foundation upon which to build a life if you don't give a child a sense of history. And that's not just some kind of flaky theory we picked up from pop psychology. It's right out of the Word of God. In Exodus 12, the Lord laid out Passover requirements. He said in verse 24, "Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants." —To be continued next month