

Being a Relevant Parent

By Josh Hatcher

This is a new generation of parenting. Postmodern-era parents encounter difficult scenarios and dilemmas that their parents and grandparents could never have imagined. So how can a young modern Christian raise kids in a postmodern culture?

[PRIORITIZE.]

God. Life. Progressive Culture. RELEVANT has them in a specific order for a reason. The relevant parent's priorities should look something like this: God. Family. Church. Career. Hobbies. Etc. Etc.

It may not seem that our relationship with God is vital to child rearing in the younger years. Changing diapers and wiping spit-up from drooling, screaming little lumps of flesh involves very little spiritual wisdom and parental guidance, and what does God's Word really have to do with rectal thermometers?

Ultimately, a baby may not be able speak, may not always understand the words you say, but she does understand love. Love is exactly what that little child needs at 3 a.m., when you feel like you have no more love left. Putting God first gives you the physical and emotional strength you need to love that stinky little colicky one with everything in your soul.

No matter your child's age, your time is vital. Of course, you have to have income to support your family. Going to work every day does not mean that work has surpassed the priority of family. However, the amount of time you spend at work, the work that comes home with you at night and your emphasis on your career can easily usurp the place your family should hold in your life. Which is more important, the extra money? Getting ahead? The big promotion? Or your child knowing that she is loved?

[TEACH TRUTH.]

As children get older, they start to crave your wisdom. (*Mommy, does Jesus carry batteries in His pocket? When can we go up to heaven?*) Many parents teach their children a bedtime fairytale faith and ground little of it in truth—"Grandma is an angel up in heaven. God gave her wings." "If you don't be good, Santa won't bring you any presents."

Ultimately, it might sound cute at the time, but what happens when your child finds out that Grandma never really had time for God or her kids and thought the Gospel was all a bunch of baloney? Or when your child finds out that Santa is not real and starts to question the veracity of Jesus?

Sometimes children need to be protected from the harsh realities of truth, but keep in mind that every word you speak shapes their belief system. Dr. Mario Rivera, a Christian psychologist whose teaching inspired many different counseling ministries, says that by the age of 6, a child has heard some 20,000 statements about life and has already built his basic belief system on those statements.

A child's view of God is based on his relationship with his parents. A parent who teaches his or her children lies undoubtedly will present a warped view of God. Speak truth.

[DEFEND YOUR CHILD'S INNOCENCE.]

Pornography, violence, skewed sexuality and occultism are obvious enemies to the innocence of our children. We would never let a 3-year-old watch an R-rated movie. It would cause permanent damage.

However, do we carefully watch the other images that we allow into their minds? Nickelodeon, Disney, PBS and the like have a lot of good to offer. *Blue's Clues* teaches problem solving skills. Sesame Street teaches the ABCs and friendship, and Disney movies teach about everything from hygiene to heroism.

But there are people out there in the media who do not have the same priorities as you. There are people in control of writing and creating children's programming with a different worldview than you.

Unfortunately, they write their values and their morality into their programming. While it might not be outright pagan proselytizing, chances are some of the values they present will run contrary to the values you are trying to teach your child.

Please don't be legalistic and only let your child watch Miss Pattycake or VeggieTales. However, use discernment and caution. Try to preview what is entering into your home and into your children's minds. When you see a worldview that is contrary to Christianity, point it out, discuss it with your young child and help them to learn discernment. Remember that you are the gatekeeper in your home. What comes into

your home is your call and your responsibility.

[DISCIPLINE.]

Not all kids respond the same. While one child may respond to sitting in the corner, another may need a spanking. One child may need to have his crime explained in detail with a discussion about the consequences of disobedience, and another may throw such a fit at correction that no words will do. Know your child and take the appropriate response.

Too often our culture's first response is to take them to a medical doctor, tell them that our children won't behave and give them the latest drug to numb their synapses. While I don't contend that there are chemical imbalances that may affect a child's behavior, I do contend that too often, a lack of discipline precedes many prescriptions.

A loving father or mother will not see discipline as punishment. A loving father will carefully meter rewards, instruction, discipline, grace and mercy to shape his child. A loving parent also will seek help and if necessary, medical treatment, but only after carefully and patiently trying other avenues.

Parents are leaders. Fathers should be the spiritual leaders in their homes, and mothers should share the role in leading their children spiritually. Lead by example. Do not expect your children to practice behaviors that you will not. If you expect them to eat properly, then you should not pick through your vegetables. If you expect them to not gossip or complain, then do not gossip or complain. Do not expect them to show respect to their father or mother if you will not.

Parents should model the behavior they expect their children to follow. After all, how can you do what you don't know? If they do not know what it looks like to share or to love their neighbor, who else will show them?

[SHOW AFFECTION.]

Kids need affection. Little girls need to know they are beautiful. Little boys need to know they are strong. Babies like to be held and rocked. Bigger kids need to be hugged and kissed. Not all people are receptive to affection in the same way, but all of us need to know that we are loved. After all, the God of the universe gave us His Son's life as a gift and His Spirit to comfort us. The Old Testament paints a picture of God bouncing us on his knee like a loving mother. The New Testament shows that He gives us every good gift, provides for our needs and disciplines us like a loving father. Your children will relate best to God later on in life if they have a positive picture of a loving parent to look back on. Love on 'em.