

“Tyranny of Children”
September 25, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson

Proverbs 13: 18-25

**Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruction,
but one who heeds reproof is honored.**

**A desire realized is sweet to the soul,
but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.**

**Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools suffers harm.**

**Misfortune pursues sinners,
but prosperity rewards the righteous.**

**The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children,
but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.**

**The field of the poor may yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.**

**Those who spare the rod hate their children,
but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.**

**The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite,
but the belly of the wicked is empty.**

New Testament Lesson and Reflection

Ephesians 6: 1-4

Third graders pushed by mom to beautician birthday parties
Or the one I glanced at on TV where moms, thinking it cute, were pushing their little daughters to become Vega show girls
Fifth graders insisting on cell phones
Kids who expect you to pay their speeding ticket
Dads offended when you scold their child for running up and down the aisle and bumping into little old ladies.
Tantrums in the supermarket aisle because you won’t buy Ring Dings – a ridiculous rant and rave until you cave (we’d sneak away and scoff loudly, “Gee, whose kid is that?”).

Raising self-absorbed, manipulative little egotists.

So, who is in charge at your house?

God help the needy parent who needs their child’s approval.
God help the parent fearful of disciplining their child lest their child frown and become pouty, thus a terrible reflection on them, or, worse, won’t like them.

Just finished the book, In the Garden of Beasts, about Nazi Germany in the 30's. Study the international diplomatic corp of that period. Appeasement sure didn't work.

So tired of parents losing their kids to the world.

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But then, why am I surprised? We live in a surly culture where trashy, salacious, rumor filled books about political celebrities – lacking any facts, endnotes, footnotes, and based upon anonymity – likely will outsell scholarly and well-written biographies by real authors of merit and substance. Buy Doris Kearns Goodwin or David McCullough. Ignore Joe McGinniss.

This cowardice of anonymity creates a cesspool of vulgarity, gossip, lies, back-biting, and malice. No good comes of being able to say things anonymously, hiding in the mob:

*Anonymity breeds contempt; anonymity breeds incivility*  
*[Michael Smerconish radio show]*

No wonder we are experiencing an increase in bullying, especially among girls – these little princesses have been bullying their parents for years.

The internet -- occasionally useful -- panders to our worst natures, and, in reality, has incited more malice, lack of respect, falsehood, and social ill than anything else ever invented in human history.

How can we expect our children to have manners when our society has lost its? Even in the smallest villages or schools we have become more and more anonymous to each other. Hard to get away Scott free being nasty or rude when we know each other by name.

The dreaded words of my youth: "I'm going to call your parents."

Not anonymous to God, however.

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Too harsh?

Maybe. Maybe not.

A restaurant near Pittsburg received more applause than criticism the other month for banning children under six years old from the restaurant. As the owner said, "*although kids may be at the center of their parents' universe, they aren't at the center of everyone else's too.*"

Spare the rod and spoil the child!

Except that isn't exactly what the Bible says.

That is one of those popular expressions akin to "cleanliness is next to godliness," or "God helps those who help themselves;" none of which is found in the Bible.

What does Proverbs really say?

Those who spare the rod hate their children...

What is a rod? Basically, a truncheon. Jesus was beaten with a rod. Used to punish prisoners.

So: a license to bully, berate, and beat your child? A license for corporal punishment?

I sure hope not.

One reason we refused to allow our children to be spanked by the school principal when we first moved to town -- is that still done? -- was because we figured if anybody is going to do the spanking around here it's going to be us. Why? Because the principal doesn't love our children the way we do. We also figured there was a more effective means of dealing with misbehavior.

Though sometimes a principal might have to direct a truculent young lad or lass by the shoulders.

Rod: also, and bestest, a club used by shepherds to chivvy wayward sheep back toward the right path. Also a scepter wielded, as did Moses, as a sign of authority. Authority shouldn't be equated with punishment. Discipline yes, admonition yes. The premise under-girding all this 'old guy advice to the young student' of Proverbs is that if the child's innate reason and will is properly trained, the child has a better chance of serving God well and wisely. Reverence is the Biblical key for unlocking the successful and worthwhile life.

The disease is that 'it is all about me.'

The cure is the commitment that 'it is all about Thee.'

You see, I'm not sure if banning children from the restaurant treats the problem. Better would be to ban the parents from the restaurant and let the children dine.

Can we legislate a few other annoyances?

How about parents who chat loudly on their cell phone during the whole meal, or those refuse to doff their baseball cap indoors, or those work the server to the bone, snap their fingers for more water, or those who leave miniscule tips?

Or ask any of our school teachers.

Parents too drunk to go to work.

Or who confuse authority with parental tyranny.

Or parents too drugged up to help their child with his homework.

Or too busy with the latest boyfriend or girlfriend to prepare dinner.

Or whose children wake up to a new adult in the house each morning

Or too intimidated by their children because they need their children to be what they want them to be for their sense of self-worth.

Why look to laws, legislations, or policies to solve our problems – from economics to child rearing? Look instead to a change in attitude.

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What kind of parents are we?

Can we be godlike to our children?

Not godlike like the old terrible gods: Zeus with lightning bolt and fear.

Instead, imitating how our ‘Parent God’ of the Bible treats us wayward and rebellious children.

Similar to a really fine coach.

What makes for a decent coach?

- ▲ How well you get your best players off suspensions or circumvent benching them for failing to earn passing grades?
- ▲ Looking the other way when alumni reward them?
- ▲ The coach who uses the athletes for personal gain and afterwards tosses them away like used tissues?

No way.

Such coaches are the real BRATs: Behaving Rude And Tyrannical.

The good coach learns to coach from our Heavenly coach:

- ▲ Pushes us, yes, but ever aware of our limits, for at their core children want hard challenges; they want to feel worthwhile, useful.

- ▲ Encourages and respects, never discourages or disrespects.
- ▲ Is herself or himself respectable.
- ▲ Listens to the players opinions but isn't subject to them.
- ▲ Remains fair and just. And knows when to be patient.
- ▲ Knows each by name.
- ▲ Yes, a good coach -- similar to God -- always is in charge and exercises rightful authority: setting boundaries, setting expectations, knows when to say 'no,' refuses to appease bad behavior.

These skills are what Paul urges in Ephesians. How the home reflects heaven.

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” —this is the first commandment with a promise: [because if you honor them]“...it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”**

**And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

Interesting how it was Dad's responsibility in Judaism to teach religion.

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Tyrants, embittering and provoking, have a way of breeding tyrants.

How do we nourish their essence, their soul? How can we remove from them the curse of futility and show them that this life prepares them for real life. How can we help them believe there is hope?

I remember one incident out front years ago with a kid invited to stop skateboarding on church property. Tried to model the respect I hoped would be reciprocated. It wasn't. He was insolent, vulgar, taunting, defensive.

First instincts were to crack him one across the mouth. But then he suddenly changed his appearance. He no longer was this defiant kid. He transformed before me, snarling at me the way a dog beaten and abused will snarl and bare its teeth when frightened.

So many lost boys. And lost girls. Lost in 'Never Never Land' with too few Wendy's to be their mom, sing them songs, set the rules, and help them say their bedtime prayers. Where Dads are pirates to be feared. Too many who have absorbed the lessons of our tyrannical culture and too few fed the lessons of faith, reverence, love. Who will help them claim a moral and spiritual core to help them make worthwhile choices?

My brother recently described how he saw so many children in his affluent neighborhood as if they are survivors of concentration camps. Resembling those gaunt souls discovered in Dachau, how once liberated they couldn't be given lots of food right away. They had to be gently nursed back to life.

