



Insights  
FROM THE  
GARDEN

**PARENTING**

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# TO GOD, YOU WILL ALWAYS BE A CHILD

Should we still discipline our children and influence their decisions even when they have already come of age? Many parents feel that children have earned the right to make their choices when they reach 18 or 21 years old. Besides, they say, they are the ones who will suffer the consequences when they make wrong decisions. Do you agree? I believe this is an idea we got from the West, particularly the U.S. Parents who believe in this Western concept of child-rearing condition, train their children to be independent at a young age.

But let me ask you, supposing your adult children end up making wrong choices, will you reject them when they decide to return and ask to live with you again? Can you do as the Americans do— make them accountable for their actions and leave them to lick their wounds on their own? Kaya n'yo ba silang tiisin? I do not know about you, pero hindi ko 'ata kaya 'yun.

I realized that if we stop disciplining and influencing our children, we will ultimately bear the consequences of their decisions with them when they get older. So, I believe we must continue to act as parents as long as we are able, especially if they still live under our roof. I believe we have the power and responsibility to do so while they are still under our care. But this power greatly diminishes when they begin to live on their own. I realized that if we want to live a peaceful life when we get old, we must do everything possible to influence and guide our children on the right path.

Do you know that this is an attitude God possesses? God is our Father and He will continue to discipline us, train us, and influence our decision for good no matter how old we are. It's because to Him, we will always be His child. Though He would accept us when we decide to return to Him after making a wrong decision, like what happened to the Prodigal Son, yet He can not remove the consequences of our sin. But there is one thing He would do. He will make all things work together for good, even though He can no longer implement His original and wonderful plan for you. That's because God will remain a Father to us, no matter how old we are.

Our children, too, will remain our children no matter how old they become.

# PARENTS DECIDE WHO THEIR CHILDREN BECOME

While having breakfast in a hotel in Davao, I overheard a group of ladies talk about how difficult it is to manage the behavior of children of this generation. I couldn't agree more, but then, a question suddenly came to my mind. *Who made these children who they are today? Who taught this generation to be what they have become?*

The Bible tells us that everything God created is good; therefore, all children were born good. But they can turn out to be bad if we do not raise them well. So how did they become so difficult to manage?

I have learned that children are responders. They respond to the things we expose them to. Who they are today is the sum total of their experience, education, circumstances, and our example. Most parents would say that they were not the ones who taught their children everything they know, especially the bad habits they have acquired. While this may be true, we parents were the ones who allowed them to be influenced by the world. Often, this happens by default. Since most of us are so busy we do not have time to guide them anymore, so we let the TV and Internet mold them.

This generation is what it is because of the generations that came before them. In farming, we say, "There are no unproductive farms, only unproductive farmers." In the same way, I believe that there are no bad children, only bad parenting.

So, when we complain about them, we basically complain about the way we have raised them. But should we just accept what this generation has become? On the contrary, I believe we must learn from our mistakes and try to help this generation find their way again. In addition, we need to also make sure that the generation that follows them will become better.

Even at this point, I would discuss with my children Denise and Daniel what we should do to raise my future apo(s) in a better way. Denise would often object and say, "Papa! Before we can even talk about that, we better look for a husband first." So sabi ko sa kanya, "If God has given you an amazing gift in the arts, He can give you an amazing husband as well." I am hoping we can improve the way we raise our children so that my future apo(s) can be a blessing to the world and not a burden.

I believe it is our responsibility to help the children of this generation. We can do this by being vigilant in what we teach them and by being careful in the examples we show them. May all your children grow to be a blessing to the world and not be a burden to anyone.

# PARENTING LESSON 1: CHILDREN ARE A HERITAGE

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a *reward*.” (emphasis mine) Psalm 127:3 (ESV)

The first thing people see about children in Psalm 127:3 is that they are a reward from the Lord. As their reward, parents treasure their children by raising them in the best way they know. Well, we definitely feel that our children are a reward while they are still small and cuddly. A parent’s heart melts when his or her young child reaches out to ask for food or asks for an embrace. But how come when they grow up, some children become like they are a curse to their parents and not a reward?

I believe this happened because parents did not understand the meaning of the word *reward*. They also failed to see children for what they really are. If you look at Psalm 127:3 closely, you will find that there is a more important word than *reward*, and that is *heritage*.

I learned that children are, first and foremost, an inheritance from the Lord. Meaning they belong to the Lord and He is their true Father. Therefore, my children can never be mine nor can they be my treasured possession. Pinaaalaga lang sila ni God sa akin. As a steward, God expects me to raise them according to His ways, not mine. My children were not always happy with the way I’ve raised them. Denise and Daniel were constantly afraid of me because I was very strict. I was strict because I felt that it was my responsibility to mold them to become what I want them to be, hoping that they will succeed in the process. But often my ways were hurtful, so my children resented me.

When I felt that I was failing, I cried to the Lord for help. He answered me by helping me understand Psalm 127 better. He made me realize that if I want to become faithful in my responsibility as a parent, I must study His ways and raise them accordingly. He showed me that I should not mold them into what I want but into what He wants them to be. He helped me understand that if I follow His ways, then I will succeed as a parent. And when I succeed, my children will become my reward. You see, we have to understand that a reward is something you get after doing a good job, not before the job.

My children are grown up now, and Peachy and I had never experienced the problems associated with raising teenagers or young adults. We have been like barkadas for a long time because we just enjoy each other’s company. The blame is often placed on me for Denise not having any suitors yet, kasi parati raw kaming magkasama. I am really glad that my perspective about parenting changed just at the right time when the situation was still reversible. Today, I believe my children are my greatest reward in life. When I took care of them as a heritage from the Lord, God gave them back to me as my reward.

# PARENTING LESSON 2: CHILDREN ARE ARROWS

“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, are the children of one's youth.” Psalm 127:4 (ESV)

Have you ever felt frustrated with your children, especially when they've failed to achieve the dreams you helped them to meet? I felt this way when my children were still young, and I thought that there was some thing wrong with them, until I learned that children are like “arrows in the hand of a warrior!”

Can an arrow hit a target on its own? Of course not! You will need a bow to use it, right? But if you already have a bow, will the arrow now hit the target? Not without a skilled warrior, di ba?

If children are like arrows, we need to understand the characteristics of arrows in order to handle them better. An arrow is an inanimate object, so it is neither good nor bad, and on its own it cannot do anything. But in the hands of a mighty warrior, an arrow can be a deadly weapon.

Our children are the same; they were born with the capacity to do good, but on the other hand, they also have the tendency to do bad things. They can only hit the target you want them to hit depending on your abilities as a parent. But since parents are just caretakers for the Lord, the target you should set for them should be based on what their Father in heaven wants.

In order to be effective, a warrior must spend time honing his skills, not talking to his arrows. When his arrows fail to hit their targets, he should not break them, but instead seek to improve himself as a warrior. I believe parents are the same. When our children do not hit the targets we want, it does not mean there is something wrong with them. Instead, it means that there are things we need to improve on as parents.

My relationship with my children only improved when I realized that parenting is not about my children, but about me as a parent! This is why I would always say that my children made me a better person. I became a better father when I changed my perspective—from looking for what is wrong with them, to wanting to know what is wrong with me. One of the most important things I learned was that, throughout the years I was frustrated with my children, they were also very frustrated with me! That was because I was not a good example of what I was teaching. You see children learn by imitating others. If they do not like what they see in us, they will instead imitate someone else. When I became more sensitive to my children, they started to listen to what I had to say and followed the direction I want them to take.

Take control of your children's future by deciding to become a better parent, because at the end of the day, God will make you accountable for the arrows He gave you.

# PARENTING LESSON 3: PARENTS ARE WARRIORS

“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.” Psalm 127:4 (ESV)

Unlike today's arrows, the shaft used by warriors in biblical times were made from any of these materials: softwood, bamboo, or reed. But it was almost impossible to find a perfectly straight shaft in nature, and each one has its own unique characteristics. So, the warrior must spend time removing the imperfections and shaping each shaft, so that he may use it to hit his target when in battle.

In the same way, no two children are the same. Each one has his/her own unique qualities. As I said earlier, every child was born with the capacity to do good, but also with the tendency to do bad things. I believe it is the parent, the warrior, who decides what kind of arrow they will become. And his greatest tool is Time!

In the past, I thought that if I send my children to school, ask them to read their Bibles, and give them tools, they will automatically become the people I want them to be. This was one of my biggest mistakes. I learned that children look for examples to follow and they will follow the people they trust, and the people they trust are the ones who spend the most time with them. Children, like our wives, measure love by the amount of time you spend with them.

Our children do not become who they are by accident. They are the sum total of their training, education, experience, discipline, and choices. As parents, we have the power to influence all these by spending time with them. I have seen a very painful truth in parenting, and it is this: the time you did not give while your children were young, they will take back from you when they are old—with interest. When children grow up to be bad, the parents have no choice but to spend more time trying to win them back and correcting their mistakes.

Because of this, I have decided to set my family as my priority after God. Work and ministry come after I have spent enough time with God, who is my Father, then my wife, who is my helpmate, and my children, who are my disciples. If you have not spent enough time with your children, do it now. It is never too late. Do not wait for the time when they collect—with interest.

# PARENTING LESSON 4: CHILDREN ARE A REWARD

“Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.” Psalm 127:5 (ESV)

The worst thing a parent can tell his or her child is, “Anak lang kita!” I believe these words are very hurtful and they insult the One who really owns them.

People often complain that life is unfair because God gave something better to others, but not to them. Some would even question why God made one person rich while the other poor. But I believe life is fair, and God does not play favorites.

The reason why one man is poor while the other is rich is because the former did not value what God had given him, while the latter took good care of what he received from the Lord. This is true for our children as well, and no child is better than the other. They become who they are based on how well their parents took care of them.

I feel one of the most taken for granted phrases in the Bible is the first part of Genesis 1:28, which says, “God blessed them...” Before God even commanded Adam to be fruitful, He first blessed him. In the same way, God has already blessed us; however, many people have a tendency not to appreciate what they have. So, some parents would ask why their children can't be as good as their neighbor's children, or why God gave them children with defects. But all children have defects, and each one has his or her own flaw. If we see them as a curse, we will react to them accordingly. But if we see them as a blessing, we will respond to them with great love and care. Do you know that the world will know you through your children, because they are a reflection of who you are? When you raise them well, even your enemies will learn to respect you.

When you look at your children, do you see them as a blessing from the Lord or a curse? Remember what I told you in Lesson 1? If you take good care of your children as an inheritance from the Lord, He will return them to you as your reward!



# WHAT I TEACH MY CHILDREN 1: GOD IS LOVING AND KIND, RIGHTEOUS AND JUST

Jeremiah 9:24 (NASB) says, "...let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord."

The Bible says that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever; therefore, these truths will never change. He extends His grace to us because He is loving and kind, but He will also remain righteous and just. These are the main things we teach our children.

First, we teach them that God is loving and kind. But how do we do this? I learned that when you teach children a principle, the first thing they do is to look for an example to follow. Since they cannot see God, they will look to us to provide that example. They will use what we do and say as the basis for understanding the principle. This was the reason why I had to drastically change my ways because many of the things I used to do contradicted the ways of the Lord.

When Denise was very young, she got angry with me because she did not understand why I had to spank her for having violated a house rule. Our house rules were *no lying*, *no disobedience*, and *no disrespect*. So that night, when I brought her to bed and told her I love her, she looked at me with a sharp stare and turned her back. I felt offended and disrespected, but I did not react because I did not want to add to the strain in our relationship. While I was hurting, I kept asking God how I should react. As this went on for days, I changed my question to, "How would You react, Lord, if You were in my shoes?" Then I remembered the father of the prodigal son. I had always wondered why he did not scold his son when he prematurely asked for his inheritance and left. But from that story, God taught me that you cannot force anyone to love you, they must make that decision themselves. I believe this was why the father gave in and just waited for his son to return.

So, I decided to wait for Denise to love me in return. I would go to her room often and tell her I love her even when she would just stare at me or sometimes just say thank you. After about three months, one night when I kissed her and told her I love her, she answered back and said, "Papa, I love you too!" I could not help but cry. And that night, I felt I understood God's love a little better. God would persistently be loving and kind, even if we do not reciprocate because that is His nature. He would never force Himself on anyone, but patiently wait for us to decide to love Him in return and when we finally do, it would give Him so much joy! That night, I taught my daughter that God will always be loving and kind to her by showing her an example.

# WHAT I TEACH MY CHILDREN 2: TO BE LOVING AND KIND

If God wants the world to know that He is loving and kind, then we need to teach our children to be loving and kind as well. We did this to our children by first being an example to them. And then, we also created opportunities for them to exercise these traits.

When our children were small, we made them serve our guests, give their seats to the elderly, and asked them to be nice even when people were not. In the beginning, they resented this because they would see other parents do the opposite to their children. I believe for a while they felt we were unfair.

When Denise was in kinder, her school had a project to bless the underprivileged. The teachers asked the children to bring the best gift they could give. While most parents bought nice gifts, Peachy asked Denise to give away her favorite toy. Can you imagine her shock? We can't remember if she cried over it but we were sure she felt very bad. Peachy would always explain to our children that being kind is a very important trait they need to learn, so if they should give gifts, they should give the best for them.

Today, it is easy for my children to be a blessing even to those who are not nice to them. They also automatically serve our guests and help the elderly because they discovered that being kind invites a lot of blessings. When they are kind, people somehow become kind to them, even those who are rude. I heard Mark Cuban, the billionaire owner of Dallas Maverick, once said, "Being nice, works!" He said in life, we should be nice to everyone we meet because when we are nice to them, they will be nice to us in return.

I believe it is important for our children to learn to be loving and kind so that people will treat them in the same way. Unfortunately, many parents teach their children to put themselves first to their detriment. But there is a more important reason why our children should act in love and kindness; it is so that the world may know that their God is loving and kind. When our children are loving and kind, they do not have to open the Bible to share the gospel. They can share God's love and disciple others, not by their words but simply BY THEIR ACTIONS.

# WHAT I TEACH MY CHILDREN 3: TO BE RIGHTEOUS

I teach my children that God is righteous and just. But what is righteousness according to God? The best definition I found in the Bible is in Deuteronomy 6:25 (ESV) which says, "It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us." This means that when God gives us commandments, He expects us to obey them. Though God gives us the freedom to obey or not to obey, yet He will always exercise His justice! He will reward the obedient and will punish the rebellious. As parents, it is our responsibility to prepare our children for their relationship with God so that they will receive more blessings and avoid punishments.

When my children were small, we established three simple rules for them to follow: (1) No disobedience, (2) No lying, and (3) No disrespect. While we taught them that these rules cannot be broken, we also made it a point to explain our rules before we impose them. We followed the idea that says, when there are no rules there is no disobedience.

When our children violate our rules, we punish them. When they consistently obey, we reward them. However, some people would tell me that we should not spank because we can always reason with them. Unfortunately, at a certain point in their lives, children are not able to understand reason, only pain.

I believe children are born with a very curious mind, so they always test the limits of this curiosity. They stop at the point when they get hurt. This is why there is such a thing called child trauma. Even when they get old, people remember their hurts when they were small. So, in order to protect them from painful consequences when they grow up, we need to show while they are small that their disobedience has painful consequences.

In Ecclesiastes 8:11 (ESV) Solomon said, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil." If you tell children that they will be punished if they disobey, and you withhold the punishment, you are teaching them to be manipulative. When they see that their mothers or grandparents can appeal to remove their punishments, you are teaching them the padrino system. Both of these do not reflect the true character of God.

As I close this post, I want you to know that the way you train your children will help form their views about God. You should, therefore, personally know God and His ways so that you can teach your children properly.

# WHAT I TEACH MY CHILDREN 4: TO LOVE JUSTICE

Why is it important to teach our children that God is just, or that He will make them accountable for every action they make?

More and more people today say that punishing our children when they do wrong is no longer necessary because kids are so much smarter these days. All we have to do is reason with them. A few years back, a friend shared with me a similar business idea that teaches how we can manage our people better. The idea is this: If you continue to look for the good in what people do and reward them, you will encourage them to always do what is good. And if you continue to ignore the wrong things they do, they will soon stop doing these because they do not get rewarded. The people who developed this principle do not realize that by ignoring the bad things people do, they have actually rewarded and encouraged them to do them again and again. This is why Ecclesiastes 8:11 (ESV) says, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil."

Siguro, kaya maraming batang pilisopo ngayon is because they were trained to reason out when they do something wrong. So, they grow up being good at doing so. Have you ever worked with people like them, 'yung walang disiplina, who do not submit to your authority, and who reason out whenever they are corrected? How did you treat them? Di ba you wanted to ignore them as a person? And even if you want to be nice, you cannot do so because of their arrogance. You would also discipline them by using the policies of the company as a guide. When I checked deeper into these kinds of people, I realized that the reason they are undisciplined is because they were not taught the idea of justice at home. Their parents only reasoned with them and did not impose punishments when necessary.

Kami ni Peachy, we decided to discipline our children when they were young because we did not want the world to discipline them when they are older. Peachy would always say, "Ako na lang ang papalo sa inyo, kasi ayaw kong iba pang tao ang gumawa niyan sa inyo." We always tell them that God is just! He will bless them when they are obedient and respectful, but He will let the people in this world punish them when they do wrong.

Do you love your children? Protect them from the cruelty of the world by teaching them to be righteous before the Lord. Teach them that obedience is not an option but a necessity. And then remember what God said in Deuteronomy 16:20 (NASB1995), "Justice, *and only* justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you."

# WHAT I TEACH MY CHILDREN 5: DILIGENCE AND HARD WORK!

After God created the earth, the Bible tells us that He planted a garden in the East and placed the man whom He had formed there. For what reason? According to Genesis 2:15, in order for Adam to cultivate and keep it. Contrary to what many people believe, God did not curse man by telling him to work because the command to work was given a chapter before he sinned. But why did God require the man to cultivate the garden He planted, which we can be sure was perfectly made? This was because if he just continued to take from it and not replenish it, that garden would ultimately become barren. On the flip side, from experience, I discovered that if you cultivate barren land, you will someday convert it into a fruitful garden. Love for hard work is an important trait our children should develop because Proverbs 10:4 (ESV) says “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

Most parents work hard to give their children a good education. Some are even willing to go into debt just to make sure their children go to the best schools. But while knowledge is important, I am learning that this is useless if the person will not couple it with the willingness to work and work hard. Unfortunately, some parents even protect their children from having to work. They do this by hiring helpers to do the difficult jobs for them. Love for work is a difficult trait to develop, and a child needs to learn it as a habit. If our children are not used to working while they are young, they will have a hard time acquiring this habit when they get older.

Diligence and hard work are important traits that God wants every person to have. Second Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV) tells us, “...If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” I realize that the good future I want for my children will greatly depend on their willingness to work hard. The education I will give them and the inheritance I hope to leave to them will be useless if I do not develop this very important trait in them.

Note:

Teaching children the importance of work is one of the reasons why we developed Semilya’s REBOOT and Jumpstart training programs. We are offering these because some parents have shared with us their frustration in not being able to develop in their children's important traits like submission, hard work, contentment, etc. They asked us to come up with a program that will help their children learn and develop these traits so they can have a better future.