

THE LAST WORD



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Child Rearing: A Remembered Art

One affliction common among grandparents is the urge to take over. I've watched my mother, who is 85, do this to our children. Now, as my own five children grow up, marry and start having children of their own I find myself doing the same thing. In fact, it's hard to keep from taking over when you know you can do it better—and with my five grandchildren I am no exception.

"You don't have to make that mistake," I want to tell my children as they stumble clumsily through child rearing. "Your mom and I have already walked that path. It goes nowhere. Go this way instead."

It seems so simple. All they have to do is follow my advice and they'll rear perfect children. Yet, it may be that real maturity comes only by making mistakes and then having to find a way out of the corner into which you've painted yourself. Reflecting back over the years, there are certain things I would do differently if I had the option of starting over. There are other things we did right—things which have really paid off.

I wish, for instance, I had taught my children correct eating habits. I'm not talking of table manners, for we spent a lot of time on that. Rather I am concerned that we raised an entire generation on junk food—ice cream and french fries. Now that Jackie and I have been convicted of our poor eating habits and are making drastic changes (no more white sugar and white bread, few red meats, lots of vegetables, fruits and grains) we find it painful to see our grandchildren eating the same things our children ate.

I wish we had observed a weekly day for family fasting and prayer. I wish we had eaten a family breakfast together with a time for prayer before the children left for school. I wish we had insisted that each child memorize passages of Scripture.

I wish we had taught each child to save money on a regular basis—setting aside a certain amount each week from allowances and wages. I wish we had read the classics out loud as my dad did to me. I still remember "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din," and "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul," not to mention long passages from Shakespeare, Thoreau, Melville and Longfellow. I wish we had listened to classical music as a family. Too often I withdrew to my own room to listen to Chopin and Dvorak rather than insult my ears with the weirdness and wildness coming from the children's radio or phonograph.

But all that is offset by the things we did right. I am glad we led each child to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ—and that each one has received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I am glad we

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taught each child the privilege of tithing as the basis of Kingdom stewardship. It's tough, watching my married children who make very little money, set aside 10 percent of each week's wages for the Lord. But it's satisfying, for I know the end results.

I'm especially glad for those individual evening prayer times. Each night I would make the rounds, sitting on the side of each child's bed, talking about personal things. Regardless of how tough the day had been, I wanted those last moments of conscious thought to be positive. I wanted each child to know his dad loved him and was proud of him. I did this every night, laying on hands and praying in the Spirit, even if the child was asleep. It was one of my better decisions.

I am glad I honored my own father and mother, and that through that example my children now honor me and their mom. I never called my parents by their first name nor referred to my dad as "the old man." Even though my parents made many mistakes, my dad was always my "hero." It is fulfilling to know my own children view me in the same perspective.

Jackie and I have made a lot of mistakes rearing our children. We've done things I wish we hadn't done—like fight in front of them. But we've never held anything back. No subject was taboo in our home. We discussed sex as openly as we discussed why they should wear a shirt at the table and why they should go to church with the family on Sunday.

Perhaps it has been this transparency—this willingness to admit we have been imperfect parents, this open admission that their parents were desperately in need of a Savior—which has knitted us together in such a tightly woven blanket. Now, instead of fleeing from home, all of our grown children have said they want to come back and live close by—along with the grandchildren.

Undoubtedly, that's going to cost me some money. After all, grandchildren need shoes—and some ice cream and french fries now and then, too. ↗