

## **Parenting Through Disappointment**

“There are too many parents in our community who are NOT doing what God requires of them with His heritage” is a well quoted idea, and often made by those who judge harshly.

The words, of course may be true, but for every parent who is not doing it, there are many more doing what God requires, and still being disappointed. And none of these parents would not question their parenting role, continually mulling over what they could have done, or not done, better.

They “toiled in vain”, for the “good (they) thought to gain”, brought them only “grief and care”, hymn 422. And “shame”, Proverbs 29.

The guilt and the suffering which goes with the disappointment is real, and so often we need to bind those parents up, and help heal their wounds.

Non parents would not be expected to know or ever appreciate the anguish of the disappointed parents who created that child/adult. They have a valid but different point of view, that of being a child in a family and so they may not appreciate the differences between children in a family, requiring different management, for one size does not fit all.

We know different children all require individual parenting methods, so that any one method that we might recommend cannot be tailor made for another. It depends on age, personality, health and stamina, position in the family, maturity, any medical condition, concentration ability and many more things. All these are factored in by caring parents.

But it is a cruelty to have critical verses quoted by someone about, or even to, a grieving parent, whose adult child has said he/she is leaving the faith. Often, that parent, in the light of the child turning adult, has other factors influencing their adult child, over which they have no control. We need to remember that no parent ever gets over a lost child. So it is an added trauma to hear your peers’ criticism, inferring that they, themselves, had success because they have “done the parenting (in the Lord), right”.

Peer pressure from other parents is a grief to many struggling or disappointed parents. Some feel that they are prevented from giving time wholeheartedly to their own unique family problems, because they are so worried about what other parents will think. We need to release those parents from that unreasonable concern. Every Christadelphian parent does the best that they can possibly do. No Christadelphian parent deliberately does neglect. It may be that some parents do not know how to parent well, but it is not a deliberate act of spiritual neglect.

There are ways to help these parents, but they need to feel comfortable with any help we might offer within our meetings, or personally, without condemnation

## **Post Lifetime Blessings**

Disappointed parents can console themselves with the thought that we can all have blessings after we die, like often happens. Leah did. She craved acceptance and security and blessings in her life, and was so often disappointed and sorrowful through that Genesis story. Leah never heard her son, Judah, being declared as “the one” by Jacob, in prophetic mode, at the time of his deathbed blessings. So blessings can come long, long after the grief and suffering, even after our deaths. Leah had a great blessing after she died.

And conversely those parents who condemn others might be surprised at what happens later in the life of their own adult children. They might be blessed in that they do not know, that after their deaths, there might have been a disappointment for them, one which they never would have expected, and never experienced.

“You can’t talk him out of habits you’ve allowed him to live himself in to” is a good maxim for parents, but again, that does not happen in every case, as we know well. Not following the “habits” of some of his Genesis family, (chapter 39) Joseph, exposed to sexual temptation, did not “live himself in to the bad habits”, he FLED. That is the positive example to use and emphasise with our children. “When everything is stacked against you, it is always possible to flee”.

There are Biblical parents, where, living within the faith, those faithful had disappointments with some of their children. Adam and Eve, where, in that first breeding family, there was a murderer. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on, were disappointed, and we see other examples all through the Scriptures. The disappointment the faithful must have felt is highlighted when we remember their record (Hebrew 11).

The Lord said of Abraham, Gen 18:17-19, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him”. The Lord’s vote of confidence in Abraham was written when Ishmael was still Abraham’s responsibility.

We know how Jacob felt about his sons after the destruction they wrought in Shechem, “You have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land”, Genesis 34, and those sons even back answered that criticism! Yet Jacob was “perfected”.

If we think there is no grief there, because of an outward attitude, (when an adult child does not accept God, or leaves), we would be quite wrong. And no one attitude by grieving parents is right or wrong. No one can understand another’s grief in the disappointment, not unless they are going through the same. In any case, He is their “hiding place”, and maybe they prefer to have their grief with Him alone, Psalm 32.

Most people can hide broken hearts pierced with those slivers of steel, and keep their tears for those who understand. But it is still unjust if that disappointment and unbearable measure of grief is topped up with the disapproval of their unfeeling peers.

No one can ever guarantee a parenting method, and none of us should be smug about how we did/do our parenting, for it is all to do with God, and His will for us and the children, who are treasures, lent to us.

None of us want unfulfilled hope, all we want are joyous blessings, and so the acceptance of God’s will is a long term battle for understanding amongst those, whose own wish and desire is an unfulfilled will.

### **God’s Will in the Matter**

Children are treasures from God for a season, He decides, and will take them to His place, or not, when He wills.

God does not keep us from evil, though we might ask Him, and trust Him to free us. We have faith that He cares for us, but it is not always the case that our will is answered, as we well know. These are stark incidents for us to wonder about. It means that we need to take God's will into account.

The same goes for families whose children make an unlikely choice, and for which we can see no explanation. We must take into account the individual's will, and eventually God's will. To blame parents for the child/adult exercising free will and call that faithless parenting, denies that freewill.

And as well, God does not keep our children in, just to please and comfort us. Our own wish/will is secondary to God's own will.

### **Disappointment and Suffering**

We do not know why God allows us suffering, like the suffering of the Prodigal son's father, or a child/adult lost to the faith.

Job questioned God about suffering, and did not get a satisfactory answer until he accepted that God decides what path the world will take, and that His ways are unfathomable, that He is in charge, and that we must accept our place in the big picture. (Job 42) "I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee ... therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not".

The only thing that we can do is to walk with Him through our suffering and underneath His shelter/canopy, Psalm 28, 61. Then when we wait on Him, He will then renew our strength, Isaiah 40, and we shall fly like eagles, and run, and walk, and not be faint.

So often these parents, understandably, have a constant habit of pray and wait, having done the best they can in parenting all through. And now those heavy laden, lay down that problem with God, as He suggests they do, for He stills their trembling hearts, and they find rest in Him, Mathew 11:28-30.

One can imagine wrapping a problem in beautiful paper, and taking that parcel up a ladder up to God, and passing that problem over to Him, climbing down, leaving that problem with Him.

The mental picture helps. It can be done with a very ill child, or any constant worry. He answers prayers, as He thinks best. But it takes lots of practise with this image, to stop "worrying oneself sick".

At first you might only get a few minutes before that problem jumps back in your mind, "driving you witless" again. The peace and worry ideas seem to be at war with each other, each for the largest piece of mind, and the worry seems to have no place to be, not content to stay in the mind's backward parts.

The lady of Shunem is a fine example of the process, "do not worry, give the problem (to the man of) God", 2 Kings 4. To all those who objected to her confidence, when she was so "vexed" with worry, she said, "It shall be well", "it shall be well". When she came near to the man of God, she said, "It is well". She gave up her son to the man of God. And it was "well" for that lady and her family, for her son was restored to them.

However, unlike that Shunem lady, (and the prodigal son), even after that closeness with the Lord, and the pray and wait, we can be disappointed with His decision, if the answer is "no".

In our grief over a lost “child” we question and question that. “Why have I been burdened with this terrible burden?” “Why is my heart broken, in pieces, and outside my body dragging along?” “I will never recover, is that what life is to be for me now?” “Why is life just going on for everybody else, as if nothing has happened?”

Logic is overtaken by emotion, and we become self centred, and we say “no one else has suffered like me”. And when praying becomes too hard, and “looking up” is all we can do, God still understands, and even that too, it seems, even that, is enough. So we say sit/walk/be where you can see Him. “Go forward with Him, and look up, look up”.

Eventually God’s amazing love guides our steps and our minds, back to places that we thought we could not ever go again. He heals our wounds with His balm better than we thought possible, and then the emotional mind catches up with the logical steps in life, and things begin to make more sense again.

We just do not know why suffering and disappointment happens, and anyone who has “lost” a child in any circumstances experiences that, except that we know that God is watching, and will help us.

We do know it is how we manage the grief and suffering that is important to God, and that He watches and holds us, and lifts our arms up, and gradually we surmount the terrible burden, and “it is well” again, like the Shunem lady said.

One of the sustaining thoughts in the grief over a lost child to our faith, is that God knows best, and that after time, His time, (which might be long time, even after our deaths), He may see fit to bring back that lost child.

We may not be there to welcome him home, as was that relieved father of the prodigal, The lesson in the prodigal son (and we give the advice too) is “never give up hope, while there is life”.

### **Training a Child in the Family and in the Ecclesia**

“Train up a child in the way he should go...” Proverbs 22:6 is often quoted about good parenting.

And so should

“Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged”, Colossians 3:21, Ephesians 6:4.

Parenting is a fine balance, and with a constant request for God to help, getting it right, with a good result, is a blessing for parents. But for those who do not get it right we understand that the suffering and disappointment is always there.

Then it is no time to be quoting either verse in condemnation. Lax parents or harsh parents who may get a limited result with the wrong balance need to believe that God now has other plans for their child. We need to remember that they did not knowingly practise spiritual abuse or neglect.

Comfort and counselling, adding God’s balm to the broken hearts of the parents, and trying to get through to the adult child, are all measures that can be taken. But for a well brought up child, or for (in our opinion) an ill brought up child, it is better that the verses be not used as a condemnation, for they are not absolutes.

It is precisely because those children are now adults with a will of their own, that they can make up their own mind, like that prodigal son. He was saved eventually from the evil that beset him,

in his absence from home. There are no discussions on how well or not, that father parented his two sons, because we really do not know. There is no indication in Scripture. Nor do we know what really goes on inside another worshipping family.

No one makes a child/adult go wrong, or right. We do our best to help children be responsible. But then some of us may be suddenly confounded, when parenting goes wrong, having never expected that, nor the disappointment, and suffering, and grief which follows.

None of us can make a six foot teen go to the meeting, if suddenly he does now wish to go, for some, hitherto, unexpressed reason. Some conservative meeting conditions, with over tight restrictions and ill behaviour, concern many parents. For, if there is a sense of contention, and strife, and lack of compassion in a meeting, that too can influence a child, and then, that now adult, can decide he/she wants no part of that. We need to remember that those elders/fathers may easily discourage the children.

So it is for many reasons that we should be not angry, or provocative, but compassionate, and loving, and forgiving, especially in times of stress, keeping the door open, in our homes, and, as well, in our meetings, not only because we would show the Lord's way, in how we deal with difficulties, but also because we would show good modelling to our children, that is, all the children in the meeting.

### **Left the Meeting, or left God**

Organized religion frightens some people especially if there have been some confronting circumstances. So they seek an alternative, and often manage their lives quite well in isolation away from the group which they feel has damaged them. The argument is compelling for those who seek that lifestyle. Many of us know brothers or sisters, even amongst our own families who have left, and are going on alone.

We are advised (commanded?) to meet together, but if that is not possible, I suspect that God accepts the alternative. It does not follow that we would condemn them "to the flames". Wise meetings always keep a watch out for those people, on the fringe or in isolation, and would offer care in needy circumstances. So it is possible that for some people who prefer it, to manage isolation very well. There are many examples of loved ones who live out their life in Christ in complete isolation, showing their beliefs by the life that they live.

We can never tell what goes on inside another brother/sister and how they manage the relationship with God. So also we can never tell how a grown child manages that relationship and would now leave their decisions up to God to receive or not receive. It is here that our parental training will out in the end result and we may never know what that end result may be.

### **The Cycle of Pain can be Broken**

The Proverbs verse works both ways, and in fact the original might be just as well referring to the negative, with as much meaning. "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it", Proverbs 22:6, is a truth, MOSTLY.

So, train him well, or not well, and he is most likely to follow that training, MOSTLY but NOT ALWAYS.

A child, trained well, may not accept God into his/her life, against the expectation of so many.

A child, ill trained with evil and abuse, or with (so called by Paul) a provocative father, may certainly be “discouraged” from following his father’s faith. That’s what we need to emphasise for the self congratulatory. Such quotes are not absolutes.

Either of these two different training methods would be hard for us to turn, but not for God, and we have witnessed that. So there is always hope. Joseph shows us all, that surrounded by evil and deceit, he did not fall. The sins of the father (and in Joseph’s case his older brothers as well), recorded in Genesis, need not necessarily be committed by the children.

Neither are those sinning sons, nor those sinning fathers, were held accountable for the sins of each other.

“When the son hath done that which is lawful and right ... he shall surely live. ... The son will not bear the iniquity of the father neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son”, Ezekiel 18:19, 20. So neither son nor father can be held accountable for the sins of the other. And we do not blame the fathers of the sinners noted in the Bible. Jesse blamed for David’s sin? We would not consider it. We might speculate, but we do not know, unless we are told plainly in Scripture. So why blame our fathers/parents now, for the sins of their children?

That terrible cycle of pain can be broken, as Joseph showed us, goodness can come from evil, and righteousness can come out of an unrighteous place. And those disappointed parents can be relieved out of that cycle of pain. So the bent twig can just sometimes straighten, and the straight twig can just sometimes bend.

### **Parenting is God’s Work**

So that parents are encouraged in the view that parenting is God’s work, we need to remind them often that babies are treasured gifts of God. When we welcome new babies, we can take the opportunity to remind parents of their Godly treasure, and that their new born is a Holy gift, given as treasure for a season, and that we are praying for them as parents with the new treasure.

God works with the two parents to create a baby, every Godly parent knows that, and experiences the wonder, at the child’s birth. That’s why parenting is a three way excursion through life, and has the essence of God’s will embedded in the task. Whatever, for good or ill, we need God with us shepherding us

Learning lessons from past mistakes, and doing better with another child, are all part of life’s lessons that happen to us in all our Godly activities. If this happens, and we can do better, then disappointment may not travel irrevocably through all the family.

Or then again, as we have said, that specific disappointment may be redeemable later.

Accepting God’s will, in the face of terrible and final disappointment, is another matter. That is the lot of those who learn to travel with tragedy. I know of no way to travel with tragedy, other than with God, enfolded in His grace.

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