

Sunday, October 27, 2013

Fundamentals of Parenting (2)

Child development and the nature of children

One of the most debated topics in child development is child behavior. Does the child behavior solely depend on the environment and upbringing or do the child's innate qualities play a role in determining their behavior [Nature versus Nurture]? To answer this difficult question, let's address the following points:

First, upbringing and environmental factors in early childhood, later influence of school, and interactions with peers have a great impact on the development of children and their behavior, not only in their early development but throughout their lives as well. We give the factor of upbringing great importance because it is a factor that falls within our responsibility before God, society, and before our children after they grow.

Second, despite the important effect of upbringing on the children's behavior, **we cannot ignore the importance of the nature of the child as a unique being with the unique traits that God granted him. This includes physical traits as well as inner ones, intellectual, psychological, or spiritual. These traits distinguish the child from other children and give them unique individuality.** Therefore, the same environmental factors and upbringing conditions do not produce children with identical behavioral traits and personalities. This is confirmed by parents and child development experts.

Third, as we recognize the fact that each child is unique, we have the following responsibilities:

A. We should understand the personal traits of each one of our children and respect these personalities. As we recognize the uniqueness of each personality of our children, and understand their gifts and talents, we succeed to communicate with them and develop their personalities.

The Lord Jesus gave us the best example in this regard. He chose twelve disciples with different personalities: One has zeal like Peter; another is loving and kindhearted like John the beloved. Despite their dissimilar personalities and traits, the Lord invited all of them to preach His name after the Holy Spirit came down upon them to sanctify their abilities, diverse personalities and traits.

This approach was not used only with the disciples, but He used it with other groups of people. We always find Him handle with each person according to their background, needs and the depth of their hearts as he dealt with diverse groups of people such as tax collectors, Pharisees, and those who sold doves in the temple.

Some of the common mistakes that involve disregard of the children's personalities:

+ Harsh and overly-strict approach by parents, especially with the first born, to achieve perfection in everything, leaves negative effects on them. Most parents rectify this approach after their first child.

+ Sometimes the father pushes his son to take on the same occupation he has. While it is acceptable for the father to wish seeing his son following his career path, he should not ignore the preferences and abilities of his son.

B. Accept your child

Our children need to feel that we accept them for who they are. We should accept their character as it is with all their gifts and talents without trying to change them to something they are not and different from their natural dispositions that God created them with. Accepting our children's characters helps them to form a balanced personality regardless of their personality type. Psychology defines a person with a balanced personality as one that accepts one's self. When parents don't accept their children for who they are and constantly criticize them, it creates an inner struggle within the child and consequently the child has difficulty accepting himself.

Accepting our children's characters doesn't mean we accept their faults without rectifying their behavior. Rather, it means we accept them with their natural tendencies as created by God while rectifying any flaws whether innate to them or acquired from their environment. For instance, the parents want their child to be calm and quite not running around the house, but the child might be physically active by nature. Another example, parents want their child to be more social and active and form many friendships with others but the child might be, not an introvert, but the type that likes to form deep and meaningful relationships and limited number of friends.

C. Discovering the gifts of our children and developing them

As parents we need to encourage our children to pursue different hobbies and interests until we discover what they like and what they are talented in. We are responsible for encouraging them to practice and pursue what they like and not what we want

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