

## Appendix One

# Sixty Years of Parenting

Whatever happened to common-sense parenting? One thing is for sure; it is not so common anymore! There was a time when child training books, tapes, and videos would have rested on store shelves collecting dust. Mom and Dad just seemed to naturally know what to do. Today, stores cannot stock those same shelves fast enough to keep up with the demand.

Why are parents groping for guidance? The answer is simple; they no longer trust themselves to parent effectively. This current lack of confidence is partly because varying textbook theories have replaced role models of the past. That has caused child-rearing to become more of an academic discipline than an exercise in common sense. The inevitable consequence for parents has been an uneasy approach to parenting characterized by a lack of conviction.

In the past, the measure of good parenting was the final product of Mom and Dad's efforts. Society looked for character qualities in the child such as love, honor, and virtue and then rated the parents on their effectiveness. Today, society places a greater emphasis on what good parents tolerate than on what they produce. Society approves tolerance of all kinds of behavior, but it ignores the end product—an uncontrolled child. Since the early 1970s, our society has redefined good and bad behavior for both the parent and the child.

Why and how have attitudes in parenting changed over the years? We can trace much of the cause to social economics. One event, which was unlike anything ever experienced in our nation, became the catalyst for change—the collapse of Wall Street in 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression.

The failure of American banks started a chain reaction of altered social attitudes affecting family life, toppling parenting beliefs and practices in a domino effect. In our discussion, we will survey three generations of people—the parents, the children, and the grandchildren of the Great Depression. The following is a brief survey of what has happened in the past sixty years to the American family.

## THE 1930S

During the Great Depression jobs, work, money, and food were scarce. Those who were born after that period are unable to comprehend the struggles our parents and grandparents went through. In 1930-31, 25 percent of the work force were unemployed. One car rolled off the assembly line for every four produced in 1929. Big companies began to fold, and their small suppliers soon followed. In Chicago, 100 people a day reportedly would attack a newly dropped pile of garbage at the city dump, hoping to find food to take home. Although 75 percent of the population were still working, the fear in their minds was, “When will it be my turn?”

Since common household items were scarce, they saved everything to use and reuse. Even soup bones were recycled two and three times to make broth. Our children have often looked in their grandmother’s garage and curiously asked, “Grandma, why do you save rusty bent nails, half of a hinge, and empty window frames?” Her answer was always, “You never can tell when you’re going to need those things.” Her reply was a byproduct of the days when people had to do without.

The Great Depression forced our society back to nurturing its basic unit, the family. Each member became dependent on the others. Pragmatism and basic survival mandated this interdependency. Parents were in control and were the source of security, holding the family together.

Two distinct social groups exited the 1930s—the parents of the depression and their children. The parents returned to society, greatly set back, but with the ability to adjust. When the children of the depression reached adulthood, the memories of going without and the fear that their turn might be next motivated them to work harder and to gain security so that they and their children would never go without again.

## THE 1940S AND 1950S

In 1940, America entered the war in Europe and Asia. Jobs became more and more plentiful as the nation marched forward in the war effort. Our victories across the Atlantic and the Pacific made Americans walk tall and proud, and justifiably so. We were the nation of nations, leaders in the world, and seemingly far removed from the depression years.

As America moved through the late 1940s and early 1950s, the children of the Great Depression started their families. As the baby-boom generation began

to grow, a popular theme echoed throughout American households: “Hard work and a college education; that’s what you kids are going to have. We didn’t have much. We went without, but you will never go without.” To fulfill that promise, the father, and in many cases the mother, went to work to build financial freedom and security so they would be immune from the pain of another depression.

Just as their parents had, the children of the depression saved everything from a chair with three legs to a lamp that didn’t work. All of this stemmed from the days of doing without. Saving material possessions put our present generation on the pathway to materialism. Gaining more, bigger, and better things became a lifestyle.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the authority of the father and husband began to decline, and the number of working wives increased. That led to increased individualism among family members. The interdependent family, with each member serving the other, was gradually being replaced by an individualistic family, with each member serving himself.

## THE 1960S

By the midway point of the 1960s, those on the verge of adulthood began to reject and ignore almost everything for which their parents stood. Academia helped to accomplish that. Young people began to see their parents as representatives of the Establishment, the old structure of authority representing the abused power. As we moved into a new phase of social history, we experienced the “generation gap” and its motto, “They don’t understand me.”

Many teenagers who had everything wanted only their parents, not the success their parents tried to offer them. They were unaware of the hidden motivation for their parents’ hard work. They had no memory of the Great Depression or of the days of going without. On the other hand, the parents of the late 1960s perceived their children as ungrateful for all the sacrifices they had made on their behalf.

Parents failed to see that material possessions and financial security do not bring families together. Giving gifts does not demonstrate love nearly as much as giving of yourself. That is exactly what most children of that era wanted from their parents. The misplaced priorities of the parents were a contributing factor to the rash behavior of their children.

The conflict in the family reflected a society in turmoil. The late 1960s and early 1970s were among the most turbulent years in the history of our nation.

We witnessed the Watergate scandal, riots in our cities, the Kent State shootings, the assassinations of political figures, the dishonoring of the Presidency, and the unpopular war in Vietnam.

Authority itself became the villain rather than the actual men and women in the positions. The younger generation that was so eager to remove itself from the authoritarian society of the previous sixty years moved us to our present, no-authority society. Our society shifted from parent-controlled families to child-centered families. Mandated family ties soon became optional.

### THE 1970S

If the 1960s was a decade of change, the 1970s was the decade of rejection. One rule replaced all the rules of the previous generation—anything goes. In the 1970s, it was faddish to do natural things. We were reintroduced to natural foods, natural childbirth, and the art of natural breastfeeding. We watched Euell Gibbons eat pine needles and listened as he encouraged us to do the same. We were told, “It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature!” We went through “Save the Earth,” “Save the Beaver,” and “Save the Squid” days.

The 1970s gave way to individualism. Society encouraged everyone to do his own thing, to be his own person, and to live for the moment. Yet ironically, when things went wrong, we were told we could find answers in group encounters, group therapy, and group sessions.

Aided by the naturalist movement, anthropology (the study of man) was reduced to zoology (the study of animals). Naturalists said man was a biological animal with life existing only in the flesh. That concept spawned a new morality and the acceptance of changing lifestyles. Sexual permissiveness became a biological fulfillment apart from morality. Society started redefining sin so that no one would feel guilty. No longer was it socially acceptable to call alcoholism drunkenness; it was now a disease. Adultery became known as free love. Homosexuality became known as an alternative lifestyle.

Emerging out of the cocoon of social change came a new parenting generation, the grandchildren of the depression. The mid and late baby boomers born to the children of the depression were now starting their families. Tired of war, political corruption, and the abuse of power, this new generation worked hard to remove any association with past parenting practices. They were going to do things differently.

In a subtle way, that generation was attempting to show their parents how

it was supposed to be done. They were going to focus all their attention on their children. That new approach paved the way for the democratic parenting craze. To accommodate this new philosophy, parenting practices had to change radically. The first change was to eliminate authority lines in the family, making everyone equal. To further that equality, parents attempted to be friends with their children first and parents to them second. They began dropping terms of endearment, such as Mom and Dad, Aunt and Uncle, and Grandma and Grandpa, replacing them with first names. Mother became Sue, Father became Jim, and everyone was a pal and equal. Parents naively believed that, if they could get their children to see them as friends, they would not see a repeat of the 1960s crisis.

They also dropped other titles from the social vocabulary, such as Mr. and Mrs., and Sir and Ma'am. To a new generation, addressing adults with titles represented the practice of the old regime, the "you will or else" parenting generation. Even now, many in our society continue to reject those designations, not because of any developmental concern for children, but because they supposedly represent the Establishment.

Cult leader Jim Jones used these theories to gain control of his followers. He eliminated all lines of authority in the family. He knew that once he eliminated titles representing authority, the children would tend to follow him as their source of security. Children called parents by their first names, and everyone was equal (except for one—the leader himself).

The 1970s also challenged the competitive spirit in athletics. Americans started to eliminate competition on the playing fields. The entire league got trophies at the end of the season, instead of just the first place team. This token was not because all the players were excellent, but because concerned parents did not want anyone who could not play as well to get a poor self-image. The new self-worth movement gained the foothold it needed by capitalizing on a naive generation and on the mistakes of the past. Now it is a multi-million dollar book business.

Parents began raising their children for the moment with little regard to the future. They thought that avoiding conflict was better than resolving conflict, so they removed all the boundaries and took down all the fences. Instead of helping a child gain the self-discipline needed not to spill his milk, they removed the milk and avoided the conflict—temporarily! This practice of avoiding conflict by giving children unlimited freedom is a curse on the parents. Freedom has a price, and the parents must pay it by becoming slaves to their children.

By the end of the decade, families were in worse shape than they had ever been. The home, school, and church were clearly on the defensive. Before the 1970s began, pastors' children were usually the best in the church. By the end of the 1970s, they were frequently the worst.

### THE 1980S AND 1990S

The child-centered emphasis of the 1970s only intensified as we moved into the 1980s, the decade of guilt and the age of excuses. In that decade, parenting moved into the no-fault rankings right along with insurance and divorce. Our families were fragmented. No one was willing to accept the blame, yet everyone felt guilty.

As in the previous decades, a new generation of “experts” had emerged. But in the 1980s, experts were different. They argued that no parent was responsible for how a child turned out. In fact, mothers and fathers of that decade whose children displayed love, honor, and virtue were told not to take any credit. They were told that they were just lucky.

By the mid-1980s, some baby boomers began to realize that something had gone dreadfully wrong with the parenting programs of the 1970s. We began to pay the price, both emotionally and monetarily, for our earlier parenting decisions. The growing feminist movement was a sure sign of the weakening role of Dad's influence in the family from 15 years earlier. Weak fathers make strong feminists.

The AIDS epidemic was the direct result of “doing our own thing” in the 1970s. The joy of free love promoted ten years earlier led to the pain of single parenting. The crisis is not simply the single parent, but the generation of children who have little or no understanding of what a completed family should be.

We have too many syndrome children in our society. Is it merely a coincidence that a dramatic increase in neuro-developmental problems began soon after democratic parenting became popular—when immediate gratification replaced deferred gratification and child-centered training became the norm? Currently, there are also a record number of teen suicides, drug and alcohol abuse cases, and pregnancies outside of marriage.

With all that happening, it is not surprising that the 1980s saw the birth of the “parenting movement” phenomenon. Since Anne Marie and I serve in family ministry, we realize how society is groping for parenting truths that are practical and successful. In the past, America followed a simple Judeo/Christian

pattern of child-rearing. It accomplished the task—not perfectly, but better than what we have seen in the last several decades. Today, we have a cafeteria of programs from which to choose. Every movement and philosophy is available in the parenting marketplace and competes for your attention and money.

#### SUMMARY

Where does all this history take us? To the present. Certainly, parenting is in the death grip of a failing social influence, and true family life is being choked right out of the church. It is now time to bring the cycle of misery, guilt, and confusion in parenting to an end. Bringing society back to the biblical foundations of the family is impossible without first bringing back the household of God. For the church to put parenting back on course, we must put secular thinking away from us; we must cling to the biblical meaning of marriage and family.

The church and the nation cannot afford to lose another generation of young parents to speculative philosophies that undermine man's relationship with God. We challenge all who embrace biblical truth as a matter of life and faith to become part of the solution. Look at marriage and family not only as they are but as they ought to be. If not for yourselves, do it for the sake of your children and their future. How can we neglect the training of those whom Jesus called precious? He desires that they be nurtured in the instruction and the admonition of His Word. That responsibility rests squarely on our shoulders.