

Your Child's Incredible Potential—Are You Helping Him Achieve It?



Understanding the nature and purpose of human life is prerequisite to helping our children develop as God intends.

By Ellis LaRavia

Children are a special blessing. God says so, unequivocally.

“Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed” (Ps. 127:3-5).

All parents and potential parents should have this perspective toward children. Children are a wonderful gift from God — one way the Creator shows His love for man.

So why is it that children in today's society must many times be considered a curse?

Why is it that although youngsters from 10 to 17 account for only 16

percent of the U.S. population, they are responsible for nearly 50 percent of all serious crimes? Why is it that violent juvenile crimes have nearly tripled since 1960?

How can an innocent little baby born from the marital union of two people become part of a dreaded scourge?

More and more young people are on court probation, imprisoned or spending time in mental institutions, or are just rebellious and going the wrong way. Where have we, as parents, gone wrong?

Centuries ago the great Creator God who ordained marriage and the family prophesied family problems in this generation. He foresaw that disobedience to His government would turn families upside down. In Isaiah 3:12, He stated that children would be the oppressors. Offspring reflect

the fact that parents have failed to obey and serve God.

Parents' role

To begin to understand the role of the parent in child rearing is to first comprehend the purpose of human life. Why did God create human life, anyway? We must know the answer to this question before we can discern the proper role of the parent in child rearing.

In other human endeavors, we spend years preparing for the various professions or careers to earn a living. A person will spend four years or more to attain a bachelors degree at a college or university. This may extend to seven or eight years to become a doctor or lawyer.

Before the advent of mechanized farm equipment, a farmer would determine how well two oxen, horses or mules worked together as a team before hitching them to a plow. Even today, we test-drive cars to evaluate and compare them before selecting one to purchase.

But little time is spent in studying or determining our role as parents. In previous generations, children were to be “seen and not heard”; today,

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however, they are not only seen but heard also, and frequently to the embarrassment of the parents.

When God created the first man and woman, He blessed them and commanded them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28).

God intended from the outset that His creation, made in His own likeness, should possess this beautiful earth and rule over it. It was His express desire for Adam and Eve to be the progenitors of offspring who would have a happy, abundant, fulfilling life on this fruitful earth. God wanted to share the riches of this earth with beings we refer to as humans, who would work, play and build families under the government of God.

It never happened! It still has not occurred 6,000 years later in man's society, except in the Church of God.

Before venturing into the realm of parent-child relationships, let's get an overview of the purpose of human life from the great Creator God. God had something in mind when He created man, and that purpose greatly impacts these parent-child relationships.

Before the creation of man, God

created angels and placed them on this earth to dress and keep it and administer His government. This was done for a while, but the angels lacked character, which God could not create by fiat. Notice what happened, as explained by Herbert W. Armstrong:

"Look, now again at God's overall supreme *PURPOSE*. It is to develop *GODLY, PERFECT CHARACTER IN THE MILLIONS OF MANKIND WHO SHALL DO THIS CREATIVE COMPLETION THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE LIMITLESS PHYSICAL UNIVERSE!*

"That is THE AWESOME PURPOSE!"

"For this *PURPOSE*, God started by creating millions of angels — spirit beings. Then He created the *PHYSICAL UNIVERSE* and this earth, and He put angels here to develop this earth, ruled by *THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD*.

"But the king He set as ruler — *LUCIFER* — rebelled, revolted, misled a third of all the angels, and *THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD* no longer governed the earth.

"Lucifer was the supreme masterpiece. If Lucifer and his angels went wrong, there was no assurance the

other two thirds would not.

"As God surveyed this tragic cataclysm, He must have realized it left *HIMSELF* as the *ONLY BEING* who will not *and CANNOT SIN!* The only possible *ASSURANCE* of accomplishing His great *PURPOSE* was for Him now to *reproduce Himself!*

"But let us answer another question before proceeding:

"*WHY* is it *IMPOSSIBLE* for God to sin? No greater power exists that will prevent Him — but God has simply by His own power — supreme and above all power — set Himself that He *will not!*

"What God saw was this. *No being less than God* could be *certainly* relied upon *NEVER* to sin, that is, *NEVER* to turn against God's *LAW*, and God's government, which makes possible His ultimate *PURPOSE*. To fulfill His *PURPOSE* for the entire *UNIVERSE*, God saw that nothing less than *HIMSELF*, and His holy, righteous and perfect *CHARACTER*, could be *absolutely relied upon* to carry out His *SUPREME PURPOSE* throughout the entire, vast, endless *UNIVERSE!*" (*The Incredible Human Potential*, New York: Everest House Publishers, Special Commemorative Edition, 1978, pp. 59-60).

Almighty God is reproducing Himself. This is vital knowledge we must have as parents and potential parents.

Children not born evil

There are many philosophies of child rearing and parental responsibility toward children. When I was a child growing up, society considered that children were to be "seen and not heard."

Today, children are the oppressors and have the controlling hand in many cases. In modern society, the roles of parent and child are horribly confused. Parents are too busy to fulfill the needs of the children — fathers and mothers work and spend little time at home. Families are disintegrating.

Children grow up not being taught right from wrong. Their values are primarily determined from television or their peers, since families have little contact. A recent poll indicated that the average family spends only 19 minutes a day together.

God does not leave us ignorant as

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parents. God teaches us — gives us knowledge, understanding and the truth about His way — and we are on trial as parents. God is evaluating our desire and ability to teach and lead others. What better place to learn than in a family situation?

We must understand that children are not born evil. At birth babies are helpless and know nothing. They are totally dependent upon the parents to provide their every need. There is nothing in their minds when that first breath of life enters the lungs for the first time. But what happens then?

We know that man has the capacity to learn. God created man with a brain. The brain itself is virtually identical to any animal brain, though differing in size. But God added another dimension to the human creation that animals do not have — the spirit in man.

God places within man, probably at birth, a nonphysical, spiritual essence. He refers to this essence as "the spirit in man."

This spirit essence, coupled with the brain, enables man to think, reason, discern and make decisions. Man's spirit provides an understanding of physical things (I Cor. 2:11). But spiritual discernment is not within the scope of man, except by the addition of another ingredient — the Spirit of God (verse 14).

Within the framework of this understanding of the spirit in man lies the basis for our understanding our own children as well as ourselves.

Every human creation has the spirit in man to discern natural or physical things but not spiritual truths. The Spirit of God coupled with the spirit in man adds the dimension of comprehending and fulfilling spiritual things. But babies and youths — our own children — do not have that spiritual dimension. They can receive it only after repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands of one of God's true ministers.

Babies possess the spirit in man and begin to absorb knowledge at birth. They are fleshly minded, only absorbing physical knowledge. God says that this fleshly or carnal mind, or the mind of the flesh, "is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

What made this fleshly mind evil? Did God create it that way? An emphatic no! The fleshly mind is not evil of itself. Neither did God make it evil. But the natural mind of man is lacking. It is incomplete. It requires the Spirit of God to be complete. But what occurs before a person receives the mind of God?

The carnal mind, as the apostle Paul explains, is a mind influenced by Satan. Man is not conscious or aware of it, but it occurs nevertheless from a very early age. Satan has a dramatic impact on the human mind, even as he did with Adam, and has blinded the whole human race (II Cor. 4:4).

This factor — Satan's influence — is what makes the natural mind become evil and turn against God. This is the invisible power that works in the entirety of the world, making mankind the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2-3, Rev. 12:9).

Just the human brain with the addition of the spirit in man is not evil. It is the added impact of Satan's spirit that works in man to cause him to disbelieve and disobey God. It is this same influence that works in all children. Yes, even in children of converted parents.

However, if we are converted, we are promised in I Corinthians 7:14 that our children are holy — even because of a single believing parent. It is reassuring to know they do have access to God, if they want it.

The process of growing up

Children are no more aware of Satan's subtle influence than are the vast majority of adults. Nevertheless, the impact is there. Satan does not neglect our children, but we can and

do unless we follow God's admonition.

Babies are subject to Satan's influence early in life. No one is immune! Vanity, jealousy, lust and greed creep in early and manifest themselves. Young children become selfish at an early stage in life. They don't know why, they just do, and as their minds develop Satan has more impact.

Resentment against the parents begins to manifest itself. Rebellion and hostility mount as a youngster approaches puberty. And human nature can become full-blown during the teenage years if we as adults do not understand our parental responsibilities and comprehend what is happening to our very own children.

This understanding is vital if we are to fulfill our responsibilities to God and our children.

Why do children go bad?

Children are not born evil. They *become* evil, and grow up into adulthood and retain that evil in their natures. The human mind and substance become deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9).

God never intended it that way. But the first man Adam made a choice — a wrong choice — and all of his children have followed in his footsteps. All are subject to the influence of Satan. So can we as parents do anything? Yes, we can, and God expects us to learn to fulfill our roles.

Children are dynamos, having seemingly boundless energy. They are like 500-horsepower diesel engines at full throttle. Some children are permitted to sit and spin their wheels wantonly. Others become runaway trucks racing through every intersection and breaking every law.

From birth, they begin to grow. A 7½ pound boy or girl, 21 inches in length, grows very rapidly with each week, month and year. Before we are even significantly aware of it, they

are at school age; by this time, most authorities believe that their personalities, learning abilities and basic potentials are set.

How much impact have we had upon them by the time they are age 6? A great deal, whether it was planned or accidental. Very soon our children become teenaged — the magic age for them, but many times seemingly a cursed age for their parents.

The growth and development process is apparent throughout the basic growth years, between birth and age 20. But there is a dramatic spurt during the early teenage years, with not only physical but also mental development. All of these years are critical. This is the age when Satan can have the greatest impact, during the development of the body and the mind.

The mind is a beautiful instrument that needs challenge, fulfillment and identity. But the teenage mind is immature, inexperienced and unbridled unless we have done our part as parents. Parents must properly guide their children during this dramatic period of growth, but this is the age when guidance is frequently grossly neglected.

Parents often are ill-prepared for these teenage years, reading hostility and resentment as a personal affront rather than recognizing the source of it. But we must help our children comprehend this phenomenon and assist in the maturing process.

Without parental leadership, guidance and direction at this critical stage, youths left to their own devices gravitate to drugs, alcohol, crime, violence and immoral sexual activity. Oh, they don't intend to — it just happens this way to thousands of youths daily. This subtle drift will inevitably occur unless children are taught, supervised, led and corrected by the parents.

We cannot afford to neglect our children! Time spent with children at any age is an investment in their and our futures. Perhaps this is doubly true during this critical stage in their lives.

Family under attack

The family in this generation is threatened with extinction. On one hand, we have thrills and excitement

in a tinsel, sparkling world that defies the imagination. But families are not close. Rather, they are disintegrating, breaking up.

In one public school class, virtually every friend of my 7-year-old son lived in a one-parent home. Marital breakups and divorces are rampant. With parents unable to solve their problems and keep their families together, fulfilling God's original admonition to Adam and Eve, it is no wonder our youths are going awry. Parents are first going awry.

The parental care of children continues throughout their and our lives. The parental role always exists, but it is ever changing because of the needs of the children. A few parents detest the role of providing every need for their children — feeding, bathing, changing diapers and caring for a baby 24 hours a day. They would prefer that the children be older and care for themselves. Others would prefer that their children always remain helpless as babies.

But neither of these wishes is realistic or proper. During the course of 20 years, the needs of a baby change dramatically through childhood, youth and young adulthood. We as parents must be prepared mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually to fulfill these needs. And we must help our children develop physically, emotionally and in spiritual understanding. God expects it. In fact, God demands it.

In Malachi 4:5-6 the Old Testament concludes with a prophecy concerning parents and children. We are called upon to set the pace — to fulfill a vital role in this age of degeneracy, family disintegration and divorce.

It seems paradoxical, but the Elijah to come is to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I [God] come and smite the earth with a curse [utter destruction]."

Mr. Armstrong and this Work are fulfilling that role of Elijah. However, we must each fulfill that responsibility and set the pace in our own families. Nowhere else can or will this happen in this age. It is incumbent upon us to fulfill our job fervently and with dedication before our God. □

(To be continued)

Big Sandy

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the decision been made to reopen the Big Sandy campus, they could not have become Ambassador students. They seemed thrilled and overjoyed at the blessing God had opened for them.

Then the sophomores came by for a handshake. One year at Ambassador, Pasadena campus, showed its fruits in their faces and manners. I'm sure they will set a fine example for the new freshmen as Ambassador students. Then the faculty came by. And what a capable, loyal and competent faculty they are! And all are members of God's Church!

Following the reception we looked in for a few moments at the beginning of a student dance in the beautiful dining hall. Then a private dinner in the faculty dining room with our party and the officials of the new college.

Friday morning was orientation for students. I spoke, after introduction of faculty members to students.

There was a faculty luncheon in the faculty dining room. Again I spoke briefly to the faculty. In the afternoon there was a meeting in the science auditorium with campus employees, whom I addressed for about an hour. Friday evening Mr. Neff took the Bible study.

Sabbath we had the overflow attendance at the afternoon service. The large auditorium was completely filled. Also the dining room, piped in with speakers. Also one or two other rooms were filled. It seemed all faces were beaming.

Friday evening there was a dinner for ministers from the surrounding area and wives — some 70 or 80 people. I spoke briefly, giving an update on the Work from Pasadena.

Then the grand finale, a concert in the main auditorium, conducted by Roger Bryant, the new chorale director, and his wife, and Ruth Walter. Mr. Bryant is a professional tenor. I heard he has performed with the San Francisco Opera Company. His wife is a concert pianist. The two women pianists played a two-piano duet after each had played solo and Mr. Bryant had sung several arias. The concert was a happy ending of a most happy and inspiring beginning! □