

Parenting Pains

It might sound like a cliché, but parenting truly is one of the toughest jobs on Earth. After about 20 years of on-the-job training, we begin to figure out what it is all about. By then it's time to let go and pretend we don't care any more.

Added to these difficulties are our own personal problems, which can include marital conflict or divorce, physical illnesses, financial pressures and the other cares of living. Our unmet needs, such as those experienced by single parents, can also lead us into behavior that will later seem terribly foolish.

Do I sound as though I'm whining here? I hope not. I'm simply attempting to articulate the challenges that can accompany parenthood and the particular discomfort that occurs for parents of strong-willed children when they begin to feel they have botched the assignment. (The parents of compliant children may not fully understand this emotional reaction, although there is usually enough related stress to affect everybody.)

Despite the discouraging moments, it is my firm conviction that bearing and raising children is worth everything it costs us. Along with the difficulties come the greatest joys and rewards life has to offer.

How could that be true? How can the very thing that brings us anxiety and stress be the source of such happiness and fulfillment? There is an obvious contradiction here that bears consideration.

Christian writer and apologist C.S. Lewis tried to express the indescribable pain that he experienced when he lost his wife to cancer. He would not have been so devastated by her passing, he said, if he had not allowed himself to love her with all his heart.

In the movie *Shadowlands*, based on this period of Lewis' life, he wondered if it would have been better never to have loved at all, and thereby to have avoided the risk of losing the woman he adored. It would certainly have been "safer" to live in a fortress, protecting himself from disappointment and grief by remaining emotionally detached and uncaring.

Lewis considered these responses to sorrow and decided that in the end, love is worth the risk. This is the way he penned his conclusion:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries ... lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

"But in that casket-safe, dark, motionless, airless-it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ... The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell!"

Then Lewis added this concluding thought: "Why love if losing hurts so much? We love to know that we are not alone."

Doesn't this insight speak eloquently of the pain associated

with parenthood? It certainly does to me. This is what bearing and raising children comes down to.

Loving those we have borne is risky business, but it is a venture that brings great joy and happiness. Even though there are often trials and tears associated with the challenge, it is a noble journey.

We as parents are given the privilege of taking the raw materials that comprise a brand-new human being and then molding him or her day by day into a mature, disciplined, productive and God-fearing adult who will live with us in eternity. Doing that job right, despite its setbacks and disappointments, is surely one of the greatest achievements of our lives.

In his Bringing Up Boys Parenting Videos, Dr. Dobson shares principles for raising boys from his decades of expertise. This self-directed program includes four DVDs and an accompanying workbook that will equip parents and youth leaders to steer the boys they care about toward confident, responsible manhood.

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