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One weekend, a family invited the preacher and his family to dinner. The family's little daughter was invited to say grace over the meal, but she hesitated and expressed that she was not sure what to say. Her mother spoke up and suggested that she just repeat what she had heard her parents say. The little girl grabbed onto that idea and said, "Oh Lord, why did I ever invite the preacher and his family over for dinner on this weekend!"

There are both costs and rewards of raising children. I have seen the breakdown of the cost of raising a child many times, but this is the first time I have seen the rewards listed this way. It's nice, really nice.

The government recently calculated the cost of raising a child from birth to 18 and came up with \$160,140 for a middle income family. Talk about sticker shock! That doesn't even touch college tuition. For those with kids, that figure leads to wild fantasies about "all the money we could have banked if not for (insert your child's name here). For others, that number might confirm the decision to remain childless.

But \$160,140 isn't so bad if you break it down. It translates into \$8,896.66 a year, \$741.38 a month, or \$171.08 a week. That's a mere \$24.44 a day! Just over a dollar an hour. Still, you might think the best financial advice says, don't have children if you want to be "rich." It is just the opposite.

What do you get for your \$160,140?

How to Have Healthy Families, preached Mother's Day 2001

Written by Bob Stone

- Naming rights. First, middle, and last!
- Glimpses of God every day
- Giggles under the covers every night
- More love than your heart can hold
- Butterfly kisses and Velcro hugs
- Endless wonder over rocks, ants, clouds, and warm cookies
- A hand to hold, usually covered with jam
- A partner for blowing bubbles, flying kites, building sandcastles, and skipping down the sidewalk in the pouring rain
- Someone to laugh yourself silly with no matter what the boss said or how your stocks performed that day

For \$160,140, you never have to grow up.

- You get to finger-paint, carve pumpkins, play hide-and-seek, catch lightning bugs, and never stop believing in Santa Claus. You have an excuse to keep reading the adventures of Piglet and Pooh, watching Saturday morning cartoons, going to Disney movies, and wishing on stars.
- You get to frame rainbows, hearts, and flowers under refrigerator magnets and collect spraypainted noodle wreaths for Christmas, hand prints set in clay for Mother's Day, and cards with backward letters for Father's Day.

For \$160,140, there is no greater bang for your buck.

- You get to be a hero just for retrieving a Frisbee off the garage roof, taking the training wheels off the bike, removing a splinter, filling the wading pool, coaxing a wad of gum out of bangs, and coaching a baseball team that never wins but always gets treated to ice cream regardless.
- You get a front row seat to history to witness the first step, first word, first bra, first date, and first time behind the wheel.
- You get to be immortal. You get another branch added to your family tree, and if you're lucky, a long list of limbs in your obituary, called grandchildren.
- You get education in psychology, nursing, criminal justice, communications, and human sexuality that no college can match.
- You have all the power to heal a boo-boo, scare away the monsters under the bed, patch a broken heart, police a slumber party, ground them forever, and love them without limits, so one day they will, like you, love without counting the cost.

When it comes to spiritual things and our children's heart condition, however, it's important we think it through. Are we making our children into wooden puppets who dance on strings, or are we helping them become real people who delight in spiritual things?

Caution, parents:

Children don't become Christians who love God because they hang out in church and go through spiritual activities.

Don't make the mistakes of our case study.

An Extraordinary Baby Dedication for Samuel

Samuel's birth parents were Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:19-22), but he grew up in the priest Eli's home. Eli effectively served as Samuel's foster father, since Hannah had promised God that if He gave her a son, she would offer him to serve God all his life.

Eli had two rebellious, older sons who were in the household, too. They were not exactly good examples (nor was Eli, for that matter) but Samuel seems to have been faithful in his spiritual duties in Eli's care—2:11; 3:19.

His example provides us with a great hope—especially for those children who grow up in less than ideal conditions—and it also provides great guidelines for healthy families! (3:19).

Lessons to Learn For Our Families

What lessons can we learn from Hannah's and Eli's families?

1. Samuel's mother, Hannah, put her hope in God and evidenced that hope with prayer—1 Sam. 2:1-11.
2. Hannah's example made a big difference—1:21-23; 2:19-19. Where did she influence most?
3. Eli's spiritual life had little impact on his two sons and only minimal impact upon Samuel—3:1-9,14.

What does 1 Samuel say to parents, singles, grandparents and siblings concerning our families?

First, we need to maintain great hope in our God, and evidence that hope and trust in our continuing prayers. We exert our greatest influence in prayer.

We need to pray for them in the following arenas: home, school, the immoral climate around them, etc. We won't be able to protect our family members from sin, even with extraordinary means. As good and necessary as our protection may be, they will find bad influences in the church (1 Sam. 2:17,22; the family (3:11-14); and the world/friends (1 Cor. 10:13). Without specific prayer for our family members, we put them at risk!

Here is a generic list of the types of prayers we need to be praying for our kids:

- their salvation—Eph 2:1-10; Rom. 3:23; 6:23.
- their character development—Gal. 5:22-23.
- the following commitments—to love and obey God; to be a good friend; to invest their lives in others through acts of kindness and discipleship; to love the Word and to love to read and study it; to stand alone if need be for what is right; to love their spouse; to love their children; to share their faith; to be a generous giver of their finances; to be a worshiper.
- God's will for their lives—Matt. 6:10.
- their provision—Matt. 6:11.
- they will have a forgiving spirit—Matt. 6:12.
- their protection from evil and temptation—Matt 6:13.
- they will know the truth from a lie, and they will be strong enough to believe and act on the truth—John 1:17; 4:23; 8:32; 2 Tim. 2:15,25-26.
- their present and future relationships, e.g., their spouse and friends—Prov. 17:17; 18:24; 27:10; James 2:23; Eccl. 4:9.

Second, parents (and family members), we should value and capitalize on the opportunities we have to influence our children (our family) for good, and never underestimate the influence we have.

Don't miss the teachable moments/meaningful moments, even if they are short. Be a student of your child/family member. Be willing to sacrifice your schedule for your child's/family member's when the clues indicate they need to communicate, or need attention now.

Learn to ask questions before you make statements. Don't abuse or under-use your influence!

Third, pay attention to what is happening to your children's/family's lives—don't lose track of their world.

Be willing to listen to others' input—2:22,24; 2:27a,30-34; 3:11-12.

Take responsibility to be attuned to their world. Don't be pushy or obnoxious about it, but find out what is happening in your family's world. Watch for signs of danger. If they're uncomfortable with something, risk rejection, anger, or embarrassment to find out. Read the surveys of their culture; listen to their music; know about their pressures; listen to their friends. Develop the skill of non-intrusive debriefings.

Also, pay attention to those who influence your children spiritually, e.g., Sunday School teachers, grandparents, youth leaders, small group leaders, etc.—2:27a,30-34.

Fourth, provide your children with reminders/symbols of your confidence in them, your love for them, and your commitment to them and to their development—2:19. (See also Deut. 6:7-9.)

What effect would that have on Samuel?

What are some symbols we could give to remind our children/family of our confidence in them?

- Christian music
- Bible study helps
- Arenas of application for their faith
- Traditions
- Affection/hugs
- Responsibilities

Fifth, provide repetitive and creative reminders of the borders of your child's freedom—1 Samuel 3:13.

Why was Eli and his family being judged so severely? "*...he failed to restrain them*"—3:13.

Is there a lesson here for parents, too? We need to teach the consequences of disobedience. The boundaries need to be understood and consistent, though enforcement should not be abusively kept. Reminders of the boundaries should be loving and firm, with sure consequences if broken.

Sixth, be aware that a vocation can make you blind to your family's needs. If the focus is all-consuming, the cost for success is too high. Our children's faith may be the price for our success.

Seventh, godly people who are wonderful examples of faith sometimes don't raise godly and obedient children—1 Samuel 8:4.

Conclusion

In order to see this lesson have its maximum impact, we need to ask and answer a number of questions:

1. In what ways did Hannah make her greatest contributions to Samuel?
2. Which of the above principles contributed the most to your failure or success in your Christian walk?
3. If you could have changed a few things about the way you were brought up, what would you change?
4. Which of the 7 principles/lessons did your parents model for you? (Explain.)
5. What lessons did you learn that you want to apply to your present family, future relationships/family?
6. What is a parent's greatest reward?