

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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THE JOY OF PARENTING

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Having just returned from a trip to visit my family in Montana, I've been reflecting upon the changes in my own life recently – particularly the addition of children. I've embarked on the fatherhood journey a little later, I suppose, than the average parent. My life prior to parenthood consisted of various expeditions that I could embark upon at will. I was able to tackle various goals that I desired to achieve. I was able to pack a suitcase or a backpack and travel to various places without a care in the world. I experienced what many bachelors today describe as the “freedom” of self-exploration (though my own self-exploration was a decidedly Christian journey). But I must admit, that the freedom to do what I wanted was often accompanied by strong periods of loneliness.

Certainly marriage brings upon a certain number of changes and direct challenges to this “freedom” but even in that experience there still exists a variable number of options – “honey, what would you like to do today? I don't know – but we could do most anything we wanted to do.”

With the arrival of children, and in particular, two children, things have changed dramatically. We no longer can simply just do whatever we wanted to do. There are diapers to be changed, baths to be poured, meals to be made and somehow encouraged into un-wanting mouths, naps to be kept, tears to be wiped, and books to be read (to them). Schedules have changed, freedoms curbed. And even in the midst of these schedules, the very children, for whom these schedules are designed, decide to disrupt them and change them at will – requiring a flexibility from parents than cannot be expected from the children! I speak as the parent who knows that his wife endures far more frequent frustrations than I do in the midst of this. But, regardless of the degree – both our lives have changed.

Though, I must add, they have changed for the better. It is an awesome responsibility to be a parent.

You are raising a little person to be a man or a woman. You are called, by God, to care for and love this child, or these children – to pay attention to their needs, to teach them about the world in which they live, and to guide them, as best as you can, in ways of God's character and love.

We are bludgeoned in popular culture with so many examples of bad parenting that it seems as if our own failure in this task is inevitable. For myself, as a pastor, others have prepared me for what is thought to be the inevitable trainwreck present in a “PK,” a pastor's kid. But I do not believe the doom-sayers.



I have no illusions that I will fail, at numerous times, as a parent. I have no false expectations of my children – as if they somehow will walk through life with relatively little personal sin or pain to deal with. But I believe that children can be raised well – and it simply demands an intentional persistence in the difficult but rewarding task of raising children. The joy present in this journey required that I not check out and delegate the parenting to my wife or grandparents. It requires me to pay attention to things seen and unseen at the end of days that are long and mentally/emotionally exhausting. Can you have delight and joy in parenting misbehaving children? Yes, when you're present, guiding, leading, hugging, kissing, cleaning them up, setting them on their feet again. For joy, in the Christian sense of the word, is never realized in the absence of difficulty and responsibility. Joy in parenting is no different.

The smiles and the voice heard “dada – help” will melt all hearts but those of stone. There's definitely a sermon here in terms of God's presence with us – but I'll leave that to you to reflect upon. Let's just say, that for me, there is no more joyful freedom than loving those entrusted to your care.