

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



September 2010

LESSONS IN PARENTING

I write this article immediately following my family's annual trip to my homeland, the state of Montana. Having returned from the vacation I have been awakened to the reality that vacation with young children is far more exhausting than I had anticipated. Gone are the relaxing, care-free vacations that my wife and I enjoyed prior to having children.

However, this is not to say that this unique phase is itself a burden, or a period to be endured. There are surprising joys and experiences that I would not trade for the world. The boys, however intensely active they are right now, are just a lot of fun. In thinking about this time, though, I've reflected on the reality that the tiredness is really a result of trying to protect my children from themselves. Trying to protect David from throwing himself off of stairs and decks, protecting Andrew from running onto the road, protecting them both from putting into their mouths things that, well, just should not go there – this is the stuff of exhaustion.

There will come a time, I am well aware, in which our parenting will be tending towards different things – no longer worrying about stairs, and roads, and meals. But it will still be, in a similar sense, an exercise of trying to protect them from themselves – from making poor decisions, from emotional vulnerabilities that come from adolescent change, from selfish interests that will lead them down a road of pain and heartache.

One thing is certain in all of this – no parent can remove the world in which their children live. There is no sanitizing it or making it safe from harm or danger. There is no depth of faith and prayer that can produce this kind of reality – nor should that be our goal. For there will come a day in which we will not be present to protect them from

themselves, nor should we desire that our children be dependent upon us in that way anymore. The whole point of parenting is not, in the end, for protection or even for outward perfection (who learns from that?) – but for wisdom: to not only make good decisions but respond appropriately to poor ones as well. This requires real living in the world as it is and even letting our children fall and fail.

So I close with a tribute to my own parents. As I sat on the back deck, constantly watching over my kids, I realized that my parents were no longer watching over me in the same way. They no longer live to protect me from myself. They've done their work, however hard it may have been, and they now have let me go, in a good way. I am, in their eyes, an adult, who must make decisions on my own – depending on them for constant direction or approval at this point, would be, for them, an indicator of problems, not health. Whatever consequences come my way they know I must learn to handle them.

I know there's a sermon in here somewhere – that though we need God to save us from ourselves, God desires that we actually grow and mature in his wisdom as we learn from the real struggles present in this world and struggles deep within our own hearts. But I'll save that for another day.

Just when I began to envy the parental freedom of my folks, I was awakened to a new reality: they now get to watch my kids!

