

# The (Often Ignored) Prerequisite to a Good Education

-----

Slowly and weightily, Pa said, “Miss Wilder, we want you to know that the school board stands with you to keep order in this school.” He looked sternly over the whole room. “All you scholars must obey Miss Wilder, behave yourselves, and learn your lessons. We want a good school, and we are going to have it.” When Pa spoke like that, he meant what he said, and it would happen. (Little Town On the Prairie, by Laura Ingalls Wilder)

“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4

The above verse is often used by Christian educators, and rightly so, to demonstrate God’s view of the kind of instruction children are supposed to receive, that is, a completely God-centered one. What isn’t pointed out often enough from this verse is to whom the imperative is given, that is, the father.

I know it isn’t pointed out enough because so many fathers, even in our church-saturated culture, have ignored the application of this clear teaching. To be fair, many fathers do consider this verse, but believe they are doing this adequately by regularly taking their families to church. The application is far more encompassing. Not long ago I had a conference with a mom who was agonizing over whether or not to have her child repeat a grade. She was asking my advice on what factors she should consider in making this tough decision. Instead of spending much time on answering her immediate questions, I told her as diplomatically as possible that this decision which was weighing on her so heavily was not hers to make; it was her husband’s. At first I was concerned that I may have offended her, but instead I had the joy of almost visibly seeing a burden fall from her shoulders. She was still understandably concerned for her child, but obviously had more peace knowing that indeed it was her husband’s decision, and, being the good father he is, he would gladly assume that decision.

Unfortunately, that type of father is all too rare in the Christian community, not to mention our general American culture. It hasn’t always been so, as evidenced by the brief excerpt above from the Little House series. I don’t know if Mrs. Laura Wilder (eventual sister-in-law to the teacher in the book) was a Christian, but her father was certainly recognized as the authority for his children’s education. American history shows us that he was not unique or unusual in his assuming of that role.

God designed mothers to be the nurturers to their children, and as such, they naturally take a very active part in their children’s education. Moms feel the ‘nest-leaving’ far more deeply than do the dads. When that first little one starts kindergarten, it’s often mom who sheds the tears and diligently scrutinizes every aspect of the school’s instruction over those first critical years. As I’ve mentioned to many people, I would rather meet with a concerned dad vs. a concerned mom any day; I call it the “Mother Bear Syndrome.” Nevertheless, having designed mothers that way, God still insists that dads take the lead in the education of their children.

How is this to be done? First, it means recognizing that it is the God-ordained role of a father to take the responsibility for his children’s welfare and education. This will likely mean some type of delegation of tasks, but the responsibility cannot be averted. The father is the Pastor, the Superintendent, and the Chief Justice in the home, all the while being a true gentleman. Dad should be at every formal parent-teacher conference. He needs to know what his kids are studying and how well they’re doing. (With four kids in school, I know how hard it is just to look at all their papers each night, but Julie lays them out for me, and it happens.) All problems in school, academic and disciplinary, should receive top priority by Dad. And a “Well done!” from Dad should be frequent and meaningful. All our current school-board members are fathers of children in Logos School. This is not a requirement, nor are women excluded by policy; this is just the way it is, and I am very grateful!

A word about fatherless homes: I am very pleased to see that in the Christian community surrounding Logos School, many single moms are actively supported and encouraged by families with fathers fulfilling their biblical roles. As a school, we seek to do the same for single moms seeking to raise godly children. The scriptural mandate of caring for widows and the fatherless is very appropriate to these situations.

A vast number of problems we currently see in both the government schools and Christian schools could be dispelled if fathers re-assumed their God-given privileges and responsibilities toward their precious sons and daughters. Pray for and encourage those fathers you know who are doing the right thing.

In Him,

- Tom Garfield, Logos School Superintendent, from "The Return of Dear Parents: Communicating the Christian & Classical Vision to Families".