

“Raise Them to be Eagles Not Prairie Chickens!”

Matthew 20:20-28

Intro. – A prairie chicken found an egg one day. She cared for this egg until it hatched. Out came a baby eagle. The eaglet, however, was raised as a prairie chicken. It waddled according to the only example it had. One day the baby eagle looked up and saw a majestic bird flying effortlessly. Prairie chicken momma came over and said, “No use looking up that at that bird. That’s an eagle. You’ll never be like that! You’re a prairie chicken.” So the eagle spent the rest of his days looking wistfully at the sky longing to soar like an eagle.

Let me use the above to ask, when it comes to the kids with whom God has entrusted us, are we raising eagles or prairie chickens? Are we seriously taking the privilege we have been given or are we responding to raising kids the way the world does – raising a bunch of prairie chickens?

In the Bible, there is a mother who is more than determined to raise her two sons as eagles. Normally, this mother receives disdain because of the chutzpa she demonstrated. She is the wife of Zebedee, mother of James and John. She is the mother who dared to ask Jesus a special request that her two sons sit on the right and left hand of His throne. Talk about a pushy, arrogant mother. She tops them all doesn’t she?

Note our Lord’s response to her. He tells them all that “*to sit on My right and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father*” (v 23). There is something missing in Jesus’ answer to this mother. Jesus gives no rebuke. What’s up with that? In my mind this lady is like the soccer moms or little league dads who demand the coaches to give their kids get top billing. Right?!

Okay, she may have been forward trying to get a lock on the eternal position for her sons, but isn’t that just like a mom? What’s sinful about a mom wanting the best for her kids? What’s to condemn in that? Apparently, nothing since Jesus doesn’t condemn her but merely clarifies her understanding of His kingdom.

This mother was ahead of the curve. She was in the forefront of faith, prophecy, and what was actually going to happen. Later we read she is one who remains at the cross and was amongst the first to get to the empty tomb (Matthew 27:56). She teaches us about seeing kids as VIP material. This lady was not a prairie chicken and she had no intentions of raising prairie chickens; instead, she was in the eagle raising business!

Purpose: to better understand how serious a matter of encouraging kids really is

This mother was a mirror in which her sons could see an image of themselves. What they saw was the vision of two young men so blessed their mother figured they might as well sit at Jesus’ right and left side. Certainly there is the danger of spoiling a child with a delusionary view. This takes place in a home that takes its cues from the world, where there is no discipline and the kids are told only how wonderful they are, not how to improve. But the *encouraging parents* are those who give feedback of the positive along with the negative. Today we’re going to consider the positive side – i.e. ways in which to encourage your child in the Lord

I Encourage LOVE Without Strings

A. Words of LOVE

1. Eros (ερος) = refers to sexual desires... where we get our word erotic...
2. Phileo (φιλεω) = brotherly love or friendship love... where we get our word *Philadelphia*
3. These two words for “love” occur because there is something desirable in a person that attracts attention. A woman is attractive/desirable to a man... a person shares many of our like/dislikes and makes us happy to be around, we cultivate a friendship...

B. New Word for LOVE

1. Jesus showed the world something it had never before seen, a style of love the Greek language called Agape (αγαπη) = a free and decisive act of the will... more than a *feeling*
2. Eros and phileo happen because a person gets fulfillment and satisfaction from another person, either by romantic involvement, friendship or both.
3. Agape is unconditional, i.e. love without strings attached = parental love the way God intended it.
 - a. parents loving the kids God has given them unconditionally because they have chosen to cherish these kids no matter the cost – note: raising kids will be costly emotions and \$...

- b. Illus. – cartoon shows a dad ranting and raving to baby in a stroller... “Do you know how much it cost to raise a kid these days...?!” Next frame shows the baby leaning up and giving a big smack on the cheek to the dad. Next frame has the dad saying, “Well, when you put it that way, I guess that’s not much at all.”
4. Kids must be encouraged to recognize, receive and give unconditional love!

II Encourage AWARENESS of Personality/Gifts

A. Personalities Are Given

1. Abe Lincoln – “When God made Abraham Lincoln He threw away the mold.” The same is true for each and every person... i.e. this includes kids.
2. Many people think there is a one-size-fits-all personality type. In turn they try to force themselves into being something they were never designed to be.
3. Parents need to help kids understand and appreciate what makes them tick (i.e. personality) identifying their strengths and their weaknesses... Don’t force kids to change their core personalities. To do so is to discourage development of their personalities given by God.

B. Gifts Are Also Given

1. Believe it is significant and important that parents encourage their kids to know and embrace their gifts (spiritual abilities) given to them by God.
2. Not miraculous gifts, but spiritual gifts as listed in Romans 12:5-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11 – gifts when brought together as a family make a strong and healthy body
3. A person with the gift of administration may not be as outgoing as one with the gift of hospitality, but the hospitable person may not have the eye for detail like the administrator. OR person with the gift of mercy will not have the same personality type as the person with the gift of leading but each will need the other to keep on the straight and narrow.
4. Proverbs 22:6 “*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.*” -- the phrase *the way he should go* refers to noting the personality tendencies of the child and through discipline and encouragement, molding them in the direction they should go.
5. We should not try to shape kids in our personality mold but identify their God given traits and direct them in that vein all in accordance to God’s Word.

C. Healthy Self-Esteem

1. There is a lot of debate over how best to establish self-esteem in kids. **Self-centeredness** is the twisted definition many have embraced for self-esteem and education is in the forefront of it all.
 - a. Diane Ravitch, prof. Education at New York University, after reviewing comments by foreign students who found American schools easier and less demanding said, “Our students tend to have more self-esteem than is apparently warranted.”
 - b. Walter Williams, prof. George Mason University: “While American students trail their counterparts in other countries in just about every academic area, they have the highest levels of self-esteem and feel good about their educational achievements. That’s sad. They’re fools and don’t know it.”
 - c. this approach to instilling self-esteem (where institutions say all people are “Okay”) is impersonal, dishonest and unbiblical.
2. Healthy self-esteem is encouraged and developed by Godly parents. Kids will respect themselves largely on the basis of how they see us as parents.
3. Illus. – when someone speaks your name, what do you think comes to your kids’ minds? Exactly how do your kids see you? Remember, kids have X-ray vision!
4. As parents we need to do the following in order to build the right kind of self-esteem:
 - a. encourage them in the Lord...
 - b. be involved in their life... build a relationship with your kids...
 - c. watch what you say Ephesians 4:29 “*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.*” In Greek, “unwholesome” means “rotten or spoiled”

- d. accept your kids for who they are – Romans 5:8 “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...*” When you and I were at our worst, God gave His best. We need to follow through in like fashion for our kids’ sake.
- e. be a velvet brick – know the when and how of discipline... = encourage awareness

Conclusion: Kirk Douglas wrote in his autobiography *The Ragman’s Son* the time he was in a high school play. He sang, danced and had a speaking role. Douglas knew his mother would be present for his performance, but not his dad. Douglas writes his dad was distant, cold and rarely spoke anything to this son that was not stern and threatening. So the night of the play he was totally surprised to spot his dad seated at the rear of the auditorium. The young actor was thrilled and hoped his dad would give him words of encouragement. But after the play Kirk Douglas’ dad stood there like a brick wall. But then, his dad made his way to young Kirk and asked his son if he would like to go get an ice cream cone. Years later, Douglas said, “...that five-cent ice cream cone meant more (to me) than any Oscar.”

Here is my point. We must encourage our kids to distinguish between worldly achievement, outward appearances, and being servants of God. A. Lincoln was not detoured in anyway by his lanky, gawky physique. Winston Churchill wasn’t discouraged by his pudgy, balding, awkward appearance. Both experienced horrendous political failures causing critics to write their professional obituaries. But it was *after* Lincoln and Churchill had been consigned to the political graveyard they became two of modern history’s greatest leaders. Do you think God had anything to do with that? Do you think God fearing parents were a part of that plan?

Our kids need our encouragement to ignore the external handicaps and not allow limitations to determine how high they can fly to God’s honor and glory. Raise them to be eagles not prairie chickens!