

PARTICIPATORY PARENTING: PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN RAISING GOD'S, AND OUR, CHILDREN
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I. Introduction

"Participatory parenting." What is this? This concept comes from the observation that in parenting, just as in every other aspect of the Christian life, we are to understand what we do as active participants with God in His work.

Phil 2:12-13 Work out your salvation . . . for God is at work in you

Col 1:29 I labor, striving according to His power

1 Cor 15:10 I labored more than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God with me

Is parenting an exception? Or should we not think of ourselves as participating in what is in fact God's work in the raising of our children? Furthermore, children are a stewardship from the Lord. They are not ours, ultimately, but God's.

Psalm 127:3 Children are a blessing from the Lord

Matt 10:37 If you love father or mother, son or daughter more than Me, you are not worthy of Me. Our and their first and only ultimate loyalty is to God.

II. Aspects of Participatory Parenting

A. Participatory creation of our children

Gen. 1:26-28 Male and female in God' image; fill the earth (traducian model)

Gen. 5:1-3 Adam has Seth, in *his* likeness and image.

What an awesome thing to think we share in the creative act whereby image of God creations are brought into existence. Perhaps human sexuality has such unique pleasure so that we can feel just some of what God feels in creating humans in his image. What a privilege; yet what a responsibility. So, . . .

- Submit to God's revealed will for human sexuality
- Embrace sexual reproduction as the awesome gift it is
- Don't use methods of reproduction that violate the personhood of procreated life
- Enter into parenting as an act of worship (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Tim 4:3-5; Heb 13:4)

B. Participatory authority over our children

Exod 20:12 The fifth commandment, stands between the first four (vertical) and the last five (horizontal)

Eph 6:1-4 We are to raise our children “in the Lord”

We stand as God to our children and so children should honor us as parents. Yet, clearly this is never an absolute authority. Remember Matt 10:37 above. The only absolute allegiance we bear is to God. Parents need to see their own authority as assisting their children to respect and follow the authority of God. So, . . .

- Assess the biblical mandate of parental authority in light of our culture’s hostility toward and rejection of most authority structures. Think biblically!
- Accept your parental authority as a gift and a charge
- Use your parental authority. Fathers in particular, avoid the equally damaging and dishonoring extremes of 1) passive neglect or 2) abusive domination
- Practical tips: 1) “to delay is to disobey” 2) make your word count 3) avoid the use of repeated but meaningless threats 4) keep your promises 5) use various forms of discipline, including spanking administered lovingly and appropriately

C. Participatory nurturing of our children

Deut 6:4-9 Taking every opportunity to train our children in the Lord

Psalms 78:1-8 God’s mandate to teach our children the Word and works of God

Psalms 127 The Lord must build the house. We trust, he builds

Psalms 128 Fear the Lord to raise a family that prospers

Prov 1:8-9; 4:1-9 Pleading with children to learn from us. We must teach them

Malachi 2:15 The goal is to raise a godly heritage

Eph 6:1-4 We nurture them in the Lord. Instruction with patience and love

Of all the ways we need to nurture our children, spiritual nurture takes top priority. Furthermore, spiritual nurture will put other kinds of activities into proper perspective and priority. So, . . .

- Lead in family devotions
- Memorize Scripture together as a family

- Pray for one another
- Keep the world in mind. Cultivate “world Christians.”
- Remember Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8 – take opportunities all along the way to remind children of God and his ways, to cultivate in them growth and godliness
- Avoid obvious hindrances to your children’s spiritual growth (TV, movies, your children’s friends)
- Care as much about their “heart response” as their “behavior conformity” or “intellectual grasp” of God’s truth

D. Participatory releasing of our children

Matt 10:34-39 “He who loves father, mother, . . . son, daughter, more than Me . . .” — Our children need to learn that their first and only ultimate allegiance is to God. We need to embrace this concept and prepare ourselves to release them fully into God’s will.

Matt 12:46-50 “Who is my mother and brothers?” — Ultimate allegiance is to Christ. All else must be subordinate to this and this alone. As stewards of our children, we must release them to the One who has absolute rights over them, for His glory and their good. So, . . .

- Remember whose they are. A principle applies to all of us, and it pertains to our children: as a Christian, the most important thing about *who* you are is *whose* you are.
- Pray from the outset that God would mold, direct, and use them in that very way of life and service that he has designed for them
- Be open to them serving as missionaries. Help prepare them for this.
- Prepare them for singleness; don’t just assume they will get married.
- Enjoy, cherish, and relish the years God gives you of children at home, but embrace his call on their lives to take them away

III. Conclusion

We are called by God to participate with him in the raising of our children. He makes possible the miracle of ongoing creation of human images of God; he calls for children to recognize the God-like authority of their parents; he commands parents to direct and nurture children to grow in the Lord; and he claims these children as his own and calls them to wholehearted discipleship. As parents, we need to see our role as carrying out, in his strength, his work. Participatory parenting is God’s plan for Christian parenting.