

## THE PARADOXES IN PARENTING

A Christmas letter I read once commented on the quickly moving parenting years by saying 'I got lost in the chaotic richness that kept me so indulged in the present that it eclipsed the passage of time.' Parenting is filled with paradoxes – so much so that I have decided parenting is the work of the soul.

Parents feel both lost in the mundane and thrilled by the novel. Parents are hungry for silence and then made deaf by silence. You'd give anything for a moment of order and then give anything for the days when kids ran thru the house laughing. You see in your grown child eye's his two year old grin but on his face his 20 year old whiskers. Parenting reveals to you the far reaches of your emotions and every miniscule step in between. And while you are traversing the continuum, your kids are teaching and molding you.

Our culture focusing on how parents are to teach our children. This of course is very important. But paradoxically what makes us a good parent is paying attention to how our children are teaching us. If you let them, your children will help you see what you may have spent a lifetime hiding from yourself. They will – perhaps to distraction – invite you be honest with yourself. This is why it takes a great deal of courage to be a good parent. Devoting your life to the life of a child, invites you into a deep mystery.

Life at my house these days is quiet – one child in college, one child still at home. I find I reflect more and cherish more – and I fret less. My kids have taught me these last two decades critical lessons. My son has taught me that respect for choices involves allowing space for mistakes. His love of old VW beetles held hands with my fear of him being defenseless in an auto accident. When he wasn't looking I snuck yard bags of potting soil in his trunk (which is under the front hood) just to make me feel like there was something between him and the next vehicle. Ultimately, I came to lean more on my faith and less on my 'mother-bear' instinct to protect (read as 'control') – and two long years later he came to desire a car with more substance.

My daughter has taught me a lesson or two on the power of perspective – like the joy of finding verses the frustration of losing. I hate misplacing things – it

drives me crazy – and I hate it when my kids lose things too. It can ignite frustration in a hyper-second. One day when the house was up to its earlobes with random piles, I commanded each member to their room, including me, to clean out their closet and sort piles. After about 20 minutes my daughter ran upstairs yelling at the top of her lungs. “Mommy, Mommy, guess what I found?” And there before me was a little girl suitcase from a sleepover several months prior that had not ever been unpacked. “You know Mom, I think that’s why I do it (hide everything in her closet) – so I can find it again! It makes a normal Saturday feel like Christmas!”

When we as parents stop to take an inventory of the lessons our children have taught us our well of gratefulness and humility will grow. As we learn to embrace our shortcomings and the sweet paradox of being taught a life lesson by a child, our store of compassion will grow.

Take a moment today to think through the lessons the children in your life have taught you. How has their honesty, innocence, courage, wisdom, and even their chaos and messes stretched and refined your perspective? Do you find that you are more gracious, forgiving, patient, curious? Do you find that you have come to value questions near as much as you value answers? Spend time here, in this rich field of memories. And as the stories emerge, take note ... and if it makes sense, specifically tell your child how they have made you a better person – by just being exactly who they are.

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