

RAISING YOUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN

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I tried to think of some good advice to give our children when they got married. One of the things that came to mind is that when they had children they had better get it firmly in their heads that they would raise them. I told them just that. So far it has worked really well and I pray that it will continue.

Couples, or single parents, struggle through those early years when they are raising their kids. They think their eyes are going to drop out with lack of sleep. Frustration levels rise to almost unexpected highs and they think they are going to blow a gasket. They struggle for significance because they gave up the things that previously gave them worth in order to raise their kids. Their time tends to be everybody's time and long to have some time by themselves.

Of course, you loved the good times you had with your children and treasure the memories that were created, but you have now planned to travel and do the things you want to do and when you want to. You dream about those empty-nest days you will enjoy! How cool it will be to recreate yourselves and enjoy your children's and grandchildren's lives in a brand new way.

All of a sudden these dreams are shattered and you find yourselves thrust into parenthood again. Your child's marriage has failed. One or both spouses become alcoholics or drug addicts. One spouse is stricken with a disease or dies and the other parent can't cope with working and raising the children. You drew the straw to raise your grandchildren. I know it's a choice, but which grandparents are going to stand idly by and see their grandchildren go into DCS care or be fostered out?

Now, before we get too morbid, let's look at what is causing the phenomena we see today. Recent figures indicate that 6% of children in the USA are being raised by their grandparents. That's 6 out of every 100 children! When I read that it shocked me and I wondered what was going on. Take away death of parents and unmerited illness, and that still leaves too many of our children that are having babies, but not taking on the responsibility for raising them.

Last weekend I was talking with a grandmother who admitted to me that her heart is too big and she still enables her 30 plus daughter's negative behavior. The daughter's marriage had dissolved and she and the children were living back in her childhood home with her mother. Grandmother told me that her daughter had basically absolved her parental responsibilities. Though her behavior was pitiful she just needed to say something endearing and grandma's heart just melted. Grandma found herself giving in to her daughter's demands and irresponsible behavior. In my estimation that's two people being irresponsible! If Grandma was like that when she was raising her daughter, then I can clearly see why that daughter continued to be immature and get her way. I told her that by enabling her adult daughter she was crippling her.

In my role as an educator I see an increasing number of our students being raised by grandparents. It saddens me to think what these children are going through. What they tell me about their lives and the feelings this induces about their parents sickens me. Cathy (9 years old) is going to New Mexico during Fall Break to live with her mother who moved there from Nashville several months ago. Cathy's grandmother has raised her for most of her life. Her mom has drifted in and out of her life in between drug binges and prison. Cathy doesn't like her mother's boyfriend, but Cathy misses her young brother so much that she wants to try living there. It's heartbreaking to me to think that these innocent children are thrown here and there by the selfish desires of their parents.

What can be done to change this phenomena and canker in our society? I believe it starts when we are raising our children. If we raise our children with a great set of values, a strong faith in God, and model what we teach we are forming a strong foundation. If we teach them to be respectful and responsible people with a strong work ethic they are less likely to go astray. If we have a vibrant, happy marriage and train our children to develop selfless, mutually endearing relationships they are less likely to choose a delinquent spouse.

Help yourself for the future by doing the hard grind in those early years. It will be your gain and society's pleasure.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.

