

Can Do Kids

Recently, in a conversation with my sister-in-law, it was brought to my attention how important it is to focus on our kids' abilities and strengths. We were discussing the differences in a child between when they are included in a task and when they are told to "go play" while the adult does the task. We agreed that children told to occupy themselves elsewhere often portrayed sunken shoulders, a defeated stance, and had disappointment written on their faces. However, when included in what the adult was doing to some degree, the child would glow and be very confident and content. I knew from experience that this was so because I had been a child too often told to entertain myself and "go play". I dwelled on this for a time and reviewed some key child-rearing books and scriptures that have helped mold our viewpoint on the subject. I realized that what was instilled in me as a child on how to interact with a child (the "go play" attitude) was not God's best. Certainly, I do not mean that a child should be "entertained" by an adult and needs to have one on one attention 100% of the time; as there are many tasks a child is capable of doing on their own accord. But I realized that if we want children to view themselves as worthy, capable individuals, we need to train them up as such.

I think parents often buy the lie that children "can't". Can't understand, can't do it right, can't sit still long enough, can't obey...etc. I wonder how many of those times that the issue really isn't that the parent just doesn't want to take the time to see. When I really thought about those motives behind telling a child to "go on and play", it is mostly selfish in just trying to complete a task the easiest and most efficient way possible. Truthfully, most daily tasks are more efficient and much, much easier if I do them myself. What service would it be to the children though if they were never afforded the opportunity of learning how to do those daily tasks? Many parents assume that by watching them do something every day, their child is learning how to do them for themselves but it just doesn't work that way. I wouldn't have wanted my dad to just expect me to have known how to drive the day I turned 16 just because I had sat in a car on occasion for 16 years prior. I then balked at the idea of viewing kids as "Can't" and focusing on what they can't do. I believe God wants us to raise "Can do" kids.

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6 KJV

Here the scriptures instruct parents to teach their children all day long and in everything we are doing. It is referring to teaching them God's word but the principal involved works for everything in life. If we want strong-minded, capable, able, self-sufficient children who grow up to be assets to society and servants in the Kingdom of God, shouldn't we start now? God's plan is for parents to include their kids in all the activities of life. This not only helps the child learn a realistic view of how life operates but helps them be unselfish and feel valued as a part of a whole. How unimportant the child who is told to "go play" must feel. I remember feeling that way; like I was a nuisance. I also remember being so mind-numbingly bored because I was given no direction for myself and did not yet possess the skills to properly direct myself. I don't blame my parents - they were merely following after the footsteps of their parents. My point is that just because we may have been inadvertently taught something in regards to raising our children, if it doesn't line up with God's Word, it is more than acceptable to abandon the practice.

Think of the child who is never expected to do work at home. They grow up having mom make their bed and prepare all the meals, maybe even clean their room for them. They surely start out feeling unimportant by the lack of inclusion and incapable, but over time they come to expect this work to be done for them. They turn into a selfish teen and then adult who "doesn't wanna" do the chores, fix the meals, do the work, etc. - a freeloader with nothing useful to contribute and no skills to anyhow. No one wants to hire a person like that; I dare say no one would want to BE a person like that if given the choice beforehand.

If we begin to view our children on the basis of what they CAN do, what they ARE capable of, within each task that we are doing, it makes for a better situation all around. For example, when I am babysitting my niece and nephew I have 4 little boys in the house (7, 5, 3, and 2) and the one girl (20 months). I make a point of saying to my niece, "While the boys are doing _____, Auntie has to fix lunch. I'm the momma so that's my job, come and help me." I then bring her in the kitchen with me and put her in her highchair. I give her a bowl of some sort and a spoon and sometimes I even put a teeny bit of water in the bowl so she really feels like she is stirring something. I pull her highchair as close to where I am working as possible without it being dangerous (like by the stove) or completely blocking my path

and then I cook, talking to her the whole time about what "we" are doing. She is "helping" me make the meal - I couldn't do it without her "help." You see, I know that at 20 months old there is very little she can actually do to help me cook lunch, but someday she will be a grown-up momma and need to be very used to fixing the meals. How pleasant I could help make that for her by teaching her from this young age that it is our special job to do this for the family. She "gets" to come with Auntie to help make the meal, she "can do" it. Of course, in the short-term it would be easier for me to sit her on the floor in the room with the other children surrounded by some toys and walk away to accomplish my task - and there certainly is a time and a place for that, but training them becomes so much more edifying for both of us when I seek out as many chances to include them in what I'm doing. Besides, I would rather her view these life-tasks as a joy rather than bondage.

Each of my 3 boys helps me cook often too, as well as clean and do all sorts of household things. Sometimes even a simple batch of cookies can turn into a whole project giving each child a special task and seeing to it that they complete it as right as possible. And it certainly CAN be fraying on one's nerves at times, especially if you feel rushed a lot, but when I remind myself that I want "can do" kids, it becomes a joy for me to include them. They really do get better and better at their tasks each time they are given the opportunity to. Besides, what's a few eggshells in the batter in the grand scheme of things?

My two oldest boys have begun to "work" at their grandmother's house on alternating weeks to try and earn their own spending money. She picks one of them up for a few hours and gives them a list of things to do around her house. The first time, she was amazed at what they already knew how to do and how well they followed instructions at just seven and five years old! I said, "Oh yes, they are very good helpers, very useful." I want my kids to be "can do" kids. I want them to be able-bodied and to be useful to others and themselves. It makes them feel valuable too. It sure is reflected in how they view themselves; they know they are assets to the family and that they are capable of worthy work. Even my 2 year old is an excellent helper. His daddy is so used to him accompanying any "handyman" type jobs around the house that he doesn't like to do them without the toddler anymore. I will see him (my husband) almost pout if the little guy goes down for a nap or something before the job is finished because he doesn't want to do it alone anymore. It is so precious for the kids to be that important and valuable to us! The little boy even thinks Daddy can't do jobs without him. If Daddy

says he needs to go feed the animals outside, my son instantly heads for the door to get his shoes. He knows if Daddy has a job to do that it is his job to help get it done because Daddy needs him!

I am also exceedingly thankful that the Lord doesn't view us based on our "cant's." He often calls "those things that be not as thought they were". (Romans 4:17) I know for a fact that he has done that in my life: calling me a grateful wife and patient mother before I ever had notion to be either, calling me his child and faithful servant (don't think I'll ever deserve THAT one), and leading me by His Spirit toward those marks. I could almost hear Him singing those words softly over me the whole time. If we, as parents, prayerfully consider the "marks" we hold out for our children to reach, we too, can lead them there step by step and watch them not only hit the marks but surpass them. That is our whole job and the whole point of parenthood! What a gift to understand that while they're young and not only in retrospect. We won't do everything right all the time as parents for we are not perfect nor do we live in a perfect world with perfect circumstances. However, doing things God's way will always produce the most amount of true lasting joy and satisfaction.

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children
walk in truth. 3 John 1:4 KJV*

When we approach our children and their training in light of what they "can do" and not based on what we could do easier without them, it helps the whole family order come into a blessed perspective. Someday, Lord willing, my "can do" kids will be equipped to raise "can do" grandkids and they will all carry an heritage not only of confidence and worthiness in work, but that also of fellowship and joy within the family. How sweet the thought of that is!

~ Amanda Paul
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* All scripture references taken from The Holy Bible King James Version