

Instant Messaging

Strange title, isn't it? That is what it is when you can send individual messages to someone using your computer and they pop up on the other person's screen. That is not the kind of instant messaging I'm referring to however. I want to "discuss" the instant messages we send each other. I think it's rather ironic that we are so often quick to put words in someone's mouth based on our interpretation of their body language, mood, and delivery, and yet many times we fail to consider those technicalities when we are the one speaking or communicating with others.

This is especially important with your children. It is true in all relationships but your influence is the greatest with your children. That is a very serious position, therefore, you should be very concerned about the messages you relay to your kids. We send our kids "messages" everyday about who they are, what life is like, what is important, etc. Our "messages", along with the ones they're receiving from peers and other adult influences, culminate to form that child's sense of reality and their worldview.

For example, if you smile at your child (of any and every age) every time you ever walk into a room where they are, you send them the ongoing message that the addition of your presence is a good thing. They will grow to always welcome you into their life. It is also a quick way to reassure them that they are noticed and worth your time. It may sound corny, but that little smirk every single time you see your child will really define how they see you.

Conversely, if you are often otherwise occupied (indifferent), or in a hurry, or pouting yourself, you are sending your child the message that they are unimportant, uninteresting, and not worth a happy look. They will grow to not involve you with things because your presence does not bring joy or peace but stress at best. And if you often bring more than indifference or a pout and are frequently angry or brash then your children will certainly grow to avoid your presence when possible. Wouldn't you if it was your parent?

(I am not suggesting that you be phony or put-on in front of your kids because they'll know it in a heart beat. No, I'm saying you can get to a place where you can have an authentic and genuinely interested smile when you are with your family!)

I especially want to focus on the messages that seem to breed self-centeredness in a child. Children, being made of flesh, will have a natural tendency to be selfish. But they must learn that the world really doesn't revolve around them if they are to thrive and mature into a healthy and spiritually sound adult. I've seen far too many situations where the child never matures and they expect

everyone else to cater to their whims. Once they are an adult it is next to impossible to alter that worldview.

The main things that send these shifted messages to a child are:

- a parent's hesitance to discipline
- inconsistency, both with rebuke and reward
- rules that bend
- reluctance to rebuke
- being too busy to teach and instruct
- quick to pacify
- giving in to whining or tantrums

How can a parent honestly expect a child to turn into a well-rounded, loving, giving, or even born-again person if this is how they're being raised? Can you really expect them to wake up at 18 and know how to live in society and understand how and why things work and what is the focus of believers if they aren't so instructed in the first 18 years?

It is pivotal to start at an early age, right from the beginning, teaching them to view life from a reality perspective. Of course, guard their little souls (Please!), but don't turn them into little terrorists. Don't give them everything they want when and how they want it. Teach them to suffer lack and remain joyful. Oh yes, God does and will provide, but not to suit our fancy, He does it for His glory. If your child's wants are thus centered, then by all means - gratify. I guarantee, though, that this will not typically be the case (as is the nature of the flesh). They make constant demands from the time they are born and it's your job as their parent to inform them that they are not in charge. By all means, feed them, care for them, play with them, work with them, teach them - but on your schedule, not theirs. Do not indulge their flesh day in and day out as they grow and then question their lack of control later.

"Be ye not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6:7)*

It Always, Always, Always works this way.

When I first began thinking about this topic I asked myself, "How come many parents think that...", and I stopped. It dawned on me, they're not thinking. They aren't approaching their role as parent with forethought and insight. They aren't carefully considering the decisions they make in parenting before carrying them out. Most of the time they are hurriedly reacting to life in the midst of disorder and they call it a family. It makes me so sad because so much hurt and confusion comes out of a life like that.

Parents, please regard your role as sacred and as a very high calling. No matter the circumstances that got you here, you are now thus ordained. Redeem the time; do not take it for granted. Your life with your children can be a beautiful and blessed thing. It will never be perfect here on this earth, but it can be splendid. Do not sulk in condemnation but rise up and fulfill your calling!

Do not merely react to life, be a planner, be someone who knows where they are and what they're doing. Consider your ways. Consider your words. It all sends "messages". Idleness is a dangerous thing. If you are unclear as to the application of that word, try to think of it like when your car is "idling". It's going nowhere. It seems like it's on, but it's not really doing anything. If you are often "idling", you're losing time and a lot of fuel. An atmosphere of idleness in a child's life sends messages of unimportance and makes them feel that nothing is "worth it". Why work? There's no point to anything.

Use common sense. Think things through. Ask yourself how you'd like to see your child when they grow up. Heck, ask them what they want to be like when they grow up. Then plan out how you'll guide them in achieving those goals. They will not get there without it. It just doesn't happen that way.

There are many messages we could "discuss": the way your bad attitude tells your husband he's a loser, the way your physical insecurities tell your daughter that she is ugly, the way your complaining makes your whole family tense. Time does not allow. I do not want to foster condemnation friend, I only wish to help open the eyes of those who are so willingly blinded. Do not let yourself be robbed of the freedoms you have in Christ, only embrace your position with a glad and grateful heart. Ask God for guidance in your decisions. His Spirit is there for us to "lead us and guide us into all truth." (Please see John 16:13.)

Be blessed and encouraged in the Lord! Read His Word, be humble before him and your family, ask forgiveness, and be renewed. Get excited about your new way of life and your great new attitude, pray often and fellowship with others that will build you up.

Rejoice and be glad! (Please see Ps. 118:24)

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