



from the desk of

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Don't Discourage them.

²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
Colossians 3:21 (NIV)

"Embitter," of course, means to make bitter. If we push the origin of the word "bitter" back far enough we run into old Norse and Gothic terms that are akin to the word "bite." As parents we drill it into our children when they are in preschool "don't bite." When might are our actions be akin to "biting?"

In her web article "*The Bitter Cost of Living Vicariously Through Your Children*" (Sylvia Cochran - <http://www.familiesonlinemagazine.com/christian-parenting/living-through-kid.html>), she suggests that we have to be very careful as we raise our children. She writes in part:

As children mature, they thrive on the separateness between the parent and them. While they still require full time parental guidance, they also need a somewhat hands-off approach in many areas of life. In others, they require gentle nudging. A parent, who lives vicariously through a child, will steamroll over a child's wishes, likes and dislikes with the explanation that s/he knows best what will do junior a world of good.

This may be the stage mom, who requires a daughter to prance on stage in a toddler beauty contest, even though the child is utterly miserable. It may be the sports dad, who yells at his child or the coach from the sidelines during pee wee soccer, even though the child would much rather participate in a gymnastics class. Much harder to notice, it is also the parent, who runs the home like a boot camp barrack where even the hint of dissent or disagreement is severely punished. Children left in the wake of this kind of parenting are quickly frustrated. As they are brought in line with the parent's thinking with the help of heavy handed discipline, they eventually get the message that they are not able to make any self-determining decisions. Over time, these children exchange the constant frustration by simply giving up and letting the parent make all the decisions.

She continues in her article that we as parents need to examine our motives - are we pushing our children in areas that are only frustrating them and are not where their interests lie? She encourages sitting down with the child and really listening to them, to find out without comment what is really frustrating them. (Something I would caution against is signing kids up for stuff just because everyone else is doing it and getting your lives totally out of balance. It was already fifteen or more years ago we had some 1st & 2nd graders not be able to make church/Sunday School on most weekends as they had Sunday morning

swim meets in Houston. I doubt that this led to subsequent Olympic medals, college scholarships or anything like that either. What I would like to know is just what as a church are we missing when a Sunday morning swim meet for young children trumps Sunday worship and Sunday School? (Maybe that's just me).

All this being said, much can be learned by being on teams and other groups. Working together, goal setting, discipline, even long-term friendships are things worthy of developing.

For me the act of encouraging kids is to help them succeed at life's tasks. We can use preparation for life as an encouragement. You are encouraged if you can accomplish something. As a parent, you, at least on some level, know that there is an "end game" of having your young person ready to face the world (unless you have a nice basement or such and plan to have them with you until - and maybe even after - they get married). If they have certain skills to ready them to face the world I believe that they are also being encouraged.

Steven J. Cole (<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-10-key-principles-parents-various-scriptures>) put it this way (in part):

Kids need certain skills to be able to function as adults. These include domestic duties, such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, basic sewing, and shopping. They need to learn proper hygiene and care of the body through nutrition, rest, exercise, etc. They should learn how to drive a car and basic car maintenance. (I'm not saying that every kid needs to learn how to change the oil, but they do need to learn that the oil needs changing!)

They should learn to take care of and respect the possessions and property God has given to them, and to respect the property of others. They should learn a biblical perspective on being managers of the finances God entrusts to them. This includes earning money (how to get a job and be good workers), spending, giving, and budgeting. Before they move out of the home they need to learn about checking accounts, investing, and the dangers of debt and greed. They should have developed a biblical outlook on how to be resourceful and live simply. They also need to learn how to manage their time so as to be responsible in completing their duties at school, their chores, etc. They need to learn how to balance work and leisure time.

I would add to this use of and even dangers of the Internet (just because it's on Snapchat doesn't mean it will really go away).

Ok, so parenting seems like a lot of work. It is said that it takes 10,000 hours to be an expert at something. If you're getting your child ready to be functioning on their own at 18, that's about 1.5 hours a day (ok, a rough average. The first 2-3 dozen months are more concerned simply with eating a good variety of foods, sleeping along some type of schedule and potty training - but then these are also good skills to have going into adulthood as well!).

Do go out and encourage your child. Help them develop the strengths that God has given them. Help them prepare for all phases of life, including the spiritual.

Need further ideas with specific needs? I'm only an email away! (dcerandy@blcbs.org).

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