

Three Rules for Parenting

Scriptures: Psalms 23 Hymns: red hymnal: pages 431 "Go, My Children"
I Samuel 17:34-36 page 511 "Strong, Gentle Children"
Matthew 3:16 page 452 "Here I Am Lord"
Matthew 18:6-7 and 10-14

Good-morning. My name is Angela Ver Ploeg and I've been attending here since 2001. I am usually here in Anchorage on weekends and during the summer. Much of the rest of my time is spent in Native villages working with school children that have problems. I am a school psychologist. I evaluate the children to diagnose their problems and make recommendations for their programming. I go to schools that cannot be driven to. Most of these schools are very small. This year I'll probably go to about 25 different schools.

Thirty-one years ago today my daughter committed suicide. Within one year I was divorced and within two years, when my youngest child began college I started graduate school to become a school psychologist. In September I will be starting my 27th year. Much of what I'm talking about today are things that might have made a difference for my daughter.

This is what I consider to be the most important things we can do to help in raising the adults of tomorrow. Some of you may think, "Well, I have no children," or "My children are grown, so she's not talking to me." I am talking to all of us because I'm talking about what children deserve, what they need, and what they often don't get from their parents. Yes, to do the job right it DOES take a village!

When we look at Jesus' teachings, it seems to me that he put more emphasis on the importance of protecting children than on many other issues. Jesus did not address forms of baptism, tithing, alcohol consumption, or homosexuality. He said very little about taking care of the elderly. Jesus refused to go home with his mother when she came for him at Capernaum.

In Matthew 8: 21 & 22 Jesus tells a man that if he wants to follow him, it must be NOW and not after he has buried his father. Some opportunities cannot be put off. So, too, with children. Sometimes an opportunity lost has devastating results.

Jesus had no children of his own, yet the care of children was very important to him. He was very concerned about how they were treated. Jesus even said, in Matthew 18, "But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones...it would be better for him to have a millstone hung round his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." Who was he talking to? Only parents? I don't think so.

We know that the structure of a home is for a child to have a mother and a father. I think the primary purpose of parents is to protect their young. Look at nature and the strong drive a mother bear or moose has to protect their young. During the first couple years the mother's relationship with the child is extremely important. As the child gets older, he usually observes that the father is considered the strong one and is looked up to as being the "head" of the home. Gradually the relationship with and the opinion of the father, becomes more and more important.

Unfortunately, we often don't have perfect homes and some who are close to perfect may still need more. Many parents cannot do the job for various reasons. That is where the rest of us come in. Who had the most impact on your life? It could have been an uncle or a grand-mother. It may have been a neighbor or a school janitor. Every child needs and DESERVES good parenting. It is our responsibility to be available to be

mentors to any child in need. Some do this by being foster parents but many are just there at the time they are needed to do what is needed and they make major differences in the lives of children. I call this mentoring.

I want to talk about three things that I consider the marks of good parenting. These are things Jesus did receive from his Father. In Matthew 3:16, following Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened and a voice, like thunder, proclaimed to the crowd, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" The first thing every child deserves and needs is to hear a message like this. Now think a bit—who said that to you? Maybe not in those exact words, but that was the message.

One Native boy I first saw at age six I saw this year on his 15th birthday. I spoke with his mother. Last summer he worked with the street department in his village and he was so proud to be a part of the group. He was excited about what he could do and was up every morning, eager to get started. At school he helps with the cafeteria work. His mother said to me, "HE IS SOO SMART!!!" That sounded to me like the message, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." I think that had a lot to do with the way he stood tall and straight and was so responsible. I thought, "I hope she never stops thinking that and I hope she never stops saying that!!" The reason I knew him? He had a problem. Of course! Those are the only kids I see. He is severely mentally retarded. What a great man he is becoming!! He is not likely to become a problem to society.

We never outgrow our need to hear that. When was the last time you told your spouse that he or she is the GREATEST!!!! ---in whom you are **well** pleased?

The second thing children deserve is to have a father (or mentor, or mother, or grandfather, or uncle), ideally the father, who says, "There will be tough times along the way and I want you to know that I am here for you." Don't just say it, SHOW IT!! This needs to be beyond words.

Jesus had tough times. One was when his cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded. When word came to Jesus, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place. Matthew 14:22 says he made the disciples embark and go on ahead to the other side, while he sent the people away; he went up the hill-side to pray alone. Later, much later, the disciples saw him walking on water. Wow! That must have been some prayer!

Other times, when he was facing difficult times he turned to his Father...in the Garden of Gethsemane...when he sweat drops of blood. He needed, sought out, and received the comforting of and strengthening from his Father. His Father was there for him. The hours ahead were to be horrible beyond our imagination. He was able to endure.

My Dad always worked with youth. He had been a Sunday school teacher since the age of 15. Woody, one of the boys in a youth group he led, was asked by the preacher of the church to not come back because he tore a page out of the hymnal. Dad said that Woody was worth more than a hymnbook.

A few years later, when Woody was 21, he found me and talked with me. He said that when everyone else was down on him, it was my father who stood by him. My Dad was there for him and he showed it!!

There was another boy, Ronnie, whose parents did not go to church. He lived near the church and came by himself and, of course, met Dad. There were many evenings that Dad was late coming home because he was with Ronnie. Ronnie is now Rev. Ronald Hill in Van Wert, Ohio. Without Dad, where would Ronnie be?

My youngest son had a mentor that was extremely important in shaping his life. When Ty was 10 years old he was writing regularly to his Uncle Cecil, exchanging

drawings and talking about steam engines and perpetual motion machines. Whenever there were family gatherings, the two of them had their special times together. Ty is now a successful mechanical engineer. Without Cecil I'm not sure what would have happened.

The third thing children deserve and need is to be assured, "Because I love you I will correct you, I will guide you, I will protect you." God did not remove the painful experiences from Jesus' life. He helped him find strength to endure. Teach with love. In the 23rd Psalm it talks of "Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me." A shepherd did not use his rod to beat the sheep but to protect the sheep. When David went to King Saul to volunteer to kill Goliath, he told about the many times he beat off the evil to protect and clear the path for the sheep.

Child protection laws are fairly new. Until recently children could be beaten or killed. In 1874 a missionary named Etta Wheeler wanted to help a nine-year-old girl named Mary Ellen Wilson who lived with her guardians in one of New York City's worst tenements. She was routinely beaten and neglected. The missionary consulted the police, but they refused to investigate. Next Wheeler went to child helping charities, but they lacked authority to intervene in the family. At that time, of course, there was no such thing as child protective services. Eventually, Wheeler sought advice from Henry Bergh, the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Bergh asked his lawyer, Elbridge Gerry, to find a legal way to rescue the child. There was no government agency or nongovernmental organization responsible for child protection. As a result of this case the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, **the world's first** entity devoted entirely to child protection, was begun. The attorney for Mary Ellen Wilson, Elbridge Gerry, served as president for more than 25 years. Bit by bit the idea of protective services for children developed. To me, that missionary was using the rod as a shepherd would to protect his sheep, so we need to protect our children.

Are we fighting injustices? Are we helping to clear the way for children to grow up mentally and physically healthy? God used John the Baptist to help make straight the way for Jesus. I would say that John was God's rod.

What are you doing with the rod you have in your hand? A good shepherd uses the rod to protect the sheep---not to beat the sheep. Then the shepherd uses his staff to lift the sheep back where he can get solid footing. The Lord is my shepherd. Thy rod and Thy staff – THEY COMFORT ME!! Yes, lets use the rod, lets fight off the dangers, the injustices and the harm that is out there and make it a safer place for our children.

How long do children need good parents? As long as they live, but especially in the early years! Whose responsibility is it? Yes, first of all it is the biological parents. That is not enough and it never has been. Then whose job is it?

Recently, a lady was talking about her foster children. She had three children of her own. Then she took on one foster child. Then they persuaded her to take a second...and a third. Why? Because of the need. Her comment was, "If everybody would just take one!!!"

When Rick and Mary were here, as I understand it, they helped with the adoption of nine Russian children and they kept two of them.

So...Three rules for raising children:

1. Give this message LOUD and CLEAR: "YOU ARE MY BELOVED IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED!!!"

2. Give this message LOUD and CLEAR: "THERE WILL BE HARD TIMES AHEAD. I AM HERE FOR YOU"....AND SHOW IT!!

3. Give this message LOUD and CLEAR: "BECAUSE I LOVE YOU I WILL TEACH YOU, GUIDE YOU, AND PROTECT YOU." Use the rod that is in your hand. Speak out. Take a stand.

And that's how I see it, on this, July 25, 2010.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *YOU* are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. Please help care for the little ones.