

Excerpt from: “Parenting Beyond Your Capacity”

Most parents can't give their children a lavish inheritance, but every parent will leave a personal legacy. With the excess that surrounds most of us, a lot of families get sidetracked from what really matters. We become so preoccupied with giving kids an inheritance that we forget the significance of leaving a legacy. Sometimes I just have to be reminded that what I give to my children or what I do for my children is not as important as what I leave in them. Isn't it interesting how “stuff” can distract us from what is really valuable?

Too often, parents believe the end goal is to make their kids happy. There are moments when I will buy anything, do anything, and go anywhere if it will just make my kids happy. Parents don't like it when their kids are in a bad mood. Things are just easier when everybody is happy. You are happy when they are happy, so you'll watch a blue dog on television, eat McNuggets, buy pet turtles, listen to the Wiggles, and mortgage your house if their happiness is at stake. You don't want them to be spoiled; you just want them to be happy.

An entire marketing industry is built around the idea that parents want their kids to be happy. The advertisers know that we will sign them up for anything and everything to make sure they are socially adept, experientially rich, and academically well-rounded. We will recruit coaches, tutors, instructors, and mentors to make sure they can dance better, sing clearer, jump farther, throw faster, hit harder, and test higher than other kids.

Whenever we define a child's happiness as our ultimate goal, we settle for something far less significant than what God has designed for them or what He has designed them for.

I have learned that some things are beyond my capacity. I have lived through several stages of parenting. I remember walking into my office one day and looking at the rows of books I had collected on family issues. One of my daughters had been through an extremely difficult situation, and I was panicked and frustrated. As I grabbed books off the shelf, I recall saying out loud, “The problem I'm dealing with right now is not in any of these books!” That day I was overwhelmed with the kind of uncertainty and fear that sometimes paralyzes parents. The only way I got any clarity was in realizing that my only comfort, my only hope, my only source for direction was God. Sometimes there are no simple solutions, no clear paths of action, no quick fixes; there is just God.

I learned to lean on a principle we refer to as “imagine the end.” The fog usually begins to lift when I mentally fast-forward to the final chapter of my children's lives and ask a pointed question: Who do I really want them to become? I know that in the middle of that answer is an understanding of who God is. Then I imagine the end and remember that God is writing His narrative.

When it comes to my children, the most difficult thing I have ever done is to admit my limited capacity and trust God to show up and do what only He can do. Some days I just need to be reminded that my family is a part of a bigger picture and that God desires to demonstrate His redemptive power through us.

