

[Parenting That Nurtures A Servant Mentality](#) [1]

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Children come into this world thinking only of one thing: me, me, me! As infants they require almost constant care. They are takers, not givers. Instead of serving others, they need to be served. As they cry out for help in the middle of the night, never once do they stop to consider whether or not they should be serving others.

All of us come into this world with a taker's mentality. It is unavoidable and perfectly normal for infants to require so much care since this is God's created method for a child's survival during this helpless period of life. However, do we want our children to continue going through life being takers and then end up being a drain on society once they reach adulthood?

Absolutely not! Somewhere, somehow children must learn that they are here to be of service to God and others. Their mentality must take a 180-degree turn.

I believe the concept "that children should serve" was much better understood a few generations ago when most families had a small farm. There was always work that children could help with around the farm, and they were welcomed into these homes because of their asset to the family. This concept is still alive in some parts of the world but it is mostly foreign in our modern American culture. Today it is rare for children to grow up on a farm. For those who do, most of the work is actually done by heavy equipment, instead of manual labor like it used to be.

Nowadays, most children are raised in city apartments or subdivisions, where there is very little for them to do. The parents work away from home, and the children are left to be entertained by their babysitters, school teachers, friends, electronic games, television, internet, etc. These children grow up expecting their parents to continue providing for them, even to pay their way through college. Many graduate, hardly prepared to care for themselves, much less to serve others. Is it any wonder that our government continues to provide more and more aid to its citizens?

This is a morbid picture of our American society. While I am not pointing this out to criticize or make anyone discouraged, I see a need to bring this to our attention so we as parents can realize that we have a great responsibility placed on our shoulders. Teaching our children to work, to be responsible for themselves, and to serve others is a difficult challenge, especially in the society in which we live. We as parents need to realize this challenge and cry out to God for wisdom (James 1:5). If we want change, we need to utilize a plan which is different than that of the world around us.

Teaching our children to work

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28).

God wants us to work with our hands. Manual labor was not a result of the curse, rather God **created** us to work with our hands. This is a concept that must be taught to our children.

The Bible says very little about teaching our children to work. Is this because it is not necessary for our children to learn to work? No. I believe this is because it was an understood concept in Bible times. Think about it. Most families had their own small farm, with no modern farm equipment, so there was plenty of work for the children to do. Today, however, most of us fathers hold jobs away from home. This is not an ideal way to teach our children to work.

Therefore, we need to plan things for our children to do, like normal daily chores, gardening, raising chickens, cutting firewood, woodworking projects, home repairs, etc. Also, when we are able to be at home, we need to make the most of our time which we spend with our children. We must include them in our work. I regret the many times that I sent my children out of my way (out of the shop, the garden, or the office) because they were constantly underfoot.

We need to find ways to include our children in our work even if it makes more work for us at the moment. If you are in the shop, they can hold your wrenches. If you are in the garden, they can carry your tomato stakes or garden tools. If they are too young to pull weeds, perhaps they can carry them to the wheelbarrow as you pull them out.

Sometimes we may need to create some work for the sole purpose of involving our little ones. They also need to be included, feel needed, and learn a good work ethic at an early age. When our youngsters are learning to help, we should give them as much praise and encouragement as we can. We all like to hear compliments for a job well done. It is an incentive to continue working with “all of our might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). This is especially true for children. The Apostle Paul used this method many times in his epistles when writing to young Christians, and so should we.

Not only can our children learn from us by watching, but when we work side by side it also creates opportunities for our child to open up about their life, share their problems, or perhaps just ask for some advice. It may be a difficulty with a friend, a serious moral struggle, or perhaps just a hunting story, but no matter what it is, our children need these opportunities to share their hearts. If we are constantly sending them off to play somewhere else so we can get the work done quickly, we are sending them down a road that will end up taking them far away from us—a road that will someday take them to a place of giving their heart to someone other than to us as their parents.

Teaching our children to be responsible

“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lamentations 3:27).

Our children not only need to learn to obey and do as they are told, but they also need to learn to be: self-motivated, responsible for themselves, and able to make their own decisions. I remember when I was a boy, my mother would give me a small section of the garden where I could plant a garden of my own. I was responsible to make my own rows, plant my own vegetables, weed, fertilize, mulch, and water at my discretion. If my garden was neglected and grew up in weeds, I bore the consequences. I also remember a time when I was in the primary Sunday school class and lost my book. Not only was it humbling for me to admit that I had lost my book, but my teacher required that I pay for the expense of the new one. It is good for our

children to learn the lessons of real life at an early age in this way. Not only should carelessness have consequences, but good behavior should have rewards as well.

Sometimes our children want to do things differently than the way we as parents prefer them to be done. I think it is good if we can allow our children room to be creative and make their own decisions (especially as they grow older), even though we know they will be learning some lessons the hard way. For example, I remember questioning my mom about whether it was necessary to fold my clothes and keep them organized in my dresser drawers. She said that if I wanted to, I could pile them in my drawer without folding them. I tried that method for a while, but decided it was better to do laundry the way mom had been instructing me. This method can at times be more effective than if we would require strict adherence to the way we have always done it. Sometimes, especially as our children are nearing adulthood, they need to start learning life's lessons for themselves.

Teaching our children to serve others

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

I believe in this last point we are finally getting to the heart of the matter. Teaching our children to be hard workers and to be responsible for themselves is not enough. They must also learn to be servants. This really is the goal. If our children learn the traits of hard work and personal responsibility only to end up becoming selfish millionaires, we really have accomplished nothing, biblically speaking. We have only set them on a path of being successful while they are headed for eternal destruction. We must go on to teach our children why they must work hard and be responsible for themselves—so they are able to serve God and others. See Ephesians 4:28.

As parents, we must show the way through leading by example. We must be convinced that this is our reason for being here. No amount of words, reasoning, teaching courses, Sunday school lessons, and lectures can take the place of what we teach by our own example. This is how Jesus taught., "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you," John 13:14-15. Peter also clearly defines it, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps," 1 Peter 2:21.

Do our children see us willingly giving up our time for others, or do they hear us complain loud and long about the sacrifices we are required to make? Fathers, do you complain to your family when it is your turn to study for a Wednesday evening topic, or when it is your turn to go to the jail service Friday evening, or when the neighbor calls and asks if he can borrow your lawnmower? Life will require many sacrifices.

God will give us many opportunities to serve. Are we looking for those opportunities? Do we view serving as a privilege or as a drudgery? Shame on us when we try to avoid opportunities for service. Shame on us when we brag to others about how we always "get out of" sacrificing our time or money. How wonderful it is when we willingly accept the opportunities God gives us to be of service! This was Paul's attitude in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you..." Also, read Philippians 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; and 2 Timothy 2:10.

We need to teach our children not only to share their toys and do their jobs, but also to do so willingly and joyfully. We really have not taught our children to share their toys from their heart, if they only do so when we insist that they do. We have not taught them the joy of serving if we allow them to grumble and complain as they go about their work. They need to be taught that giving, sharing, and serving brings joy when choosing to do so willingly.

Look for ways to teach this foundational concept to your children. For example, let us say older brother has been out sweating in the garden. Send little “Johnny” out with a glass of cold water and let him experience the joy of giving! When you give your children some candy, teach them that it brings joy to their heart when they share with others. We need to repeat this lesson until our children learn to respond this way on their own accord, without us reminding them. When your children begin to learn this concept, be sure to support their good behavior with much well-deserved praise! Instill in them a desire to serve, by explaining that we are happy because God is happy. Teach them that they are “laying up treasures in heaven” when they give their treasures away down here. Explain that when we hoard our treasures for ourselves, they only make us more miserable.

As our children get older, we should take them along with us when we have opportunities to serve. Volunteer work projects, school cleaning, mowing the church yard, and helping a neighbor start their car are all wonderful opportunities to serve. Do not leave your teenagers behind to get the work done at home. Take them along so they can experience the joy of service as well. When you take your children along to work projects, be sure to keep them involved in the work. They won’t learn this if you let them run off to play with their friends.

Remember to stay involved yourself. If you go only for the food, fun, and fellowship, your children will learn to do the same. Another pitfall is for parents to send their children off to work projects, children’s ministry, youth chorus, etc., while they stay at home to get the work done or to enjoy a relaxing evening. Go along with your children whenever you can. Be involved yourself as the opportunity affords.

Perhaps your child is old enough but not mature enough. Do not assume that they will learn to be mature away from home if they are not learning it at home. When we send our children away for service opportunities, it should be done as a sacrifice on our part, not as a way to have a break from parenting. Depending on our child’s level of maturity, we may need to make sure there is an older person along to whom they are accountable. This should be clearly communicated to your child as well as to their “guardian.” As parents we should regularly stay in touch with our children when they are away from us by calling, emailing, texting, etc.

At some point, we will need to give up our children to whatever service God is calling them. This should be our goal as parents and should be done willingly, even though it may be the most painful sacrifice we have ever made. God will reward us, in His way and in His time, just like He did with Hannah of old.

Last of all, but certainly not least, pray for your children (Philippians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). Pray that God would instill in your children the desire to serve. Pray that he would convert them from a life of selfishness. Intercede for them in your prayer closet as well as in their hearing. I remember my parents regularly praying for each of us children by name in family worship. There is only so much that we as parents can do to influence our children’s decisions. God must perform His work in their hearts, and they must personally choose to

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Published on Berean Ministry (<https://www.bereanvoice.org>)

respond to His calling for their lives (Psalm 127:1). May God add His blessing as we endeavor to raise our children for His service.

Category: [Godly Home](#) [3]

Remnant Issue: [Autumn 2016](#) [4]

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Links

[1] <https://www.bereanvoice.org/article/parenting-that-nurtures-a-servant-mentality>

[2] <https://www.bereanvoice.org/name/aaron-l-martin>

[3] <https://www.bereanvoice.org/category/godly-home>

[4] <https://www.bereanvoice.org/remnant-issue/autumn-2016>