

Teach them how to work out their own greatest happiness, by showing them that it does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed them, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all pursuits.

--Thomas Jefferson  
(Notes on the State of Virginia, 1782)

## Principle One

### CHILDREN AND PARENTS ARE THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE JOY

In building a home, the first step is to capture--in mind's eyes--the vision of the completed project. We anticipate the costs involved in time, energy and resources. We recognize from the onset of conception that there will be times when things won't work out as planned, but with a clear vision, we are likely to at least stay on course. Just as the construction of a home begins with a plan, and for the most part follows the designated plan, the construction of a great family has a greater possibility of success with a clear picture in mind.

The American system of government began, in the Declaration of Independence, with a philosophy regarding the nature and destiny of man. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The principles were considered to be "self-evident"--obvious to all reasonable minds: that man was created--not endowed by the state with--certain rights. Among these rights is the right to pursue happiness. Thomas Jefferson described, ". . . happiness. . . is the result of a good conscience. . . and freedom in all pursuits."

As I read various books on parenting, seldom was the goal of achieving happiness listed as the grand objective. In some the aim was to--increase the child's intelligence, socialization, self-esteem or self-actualization. Sometimes the goal was to adjust to society--to be able to function as a part of the grand whole. While some authors emphasized devotion to the church, others taught devotion to the state. Christian books taught how to raise children who would reverence God's law. Others shouted that children ought to be independent of the law, God's or the state's.

Of course, the pursuit of happiness is a very controversial subject--after all--whose happiness? We live, as was discussed, in an age of relativism where all morals and ethics are relative to one's personal beliefs so no one dares to define happiness for another. However, the topic of happiness is crucial to the parent or leader of children. Why? Simply because happiness is the key to success. The inner light of goodwill, humor, confidence, and cheerfulness says to the world, I am well. I am free--free to be at peace with myself and the world. I love me; I love you."

Cheerfulness is to the spirit as vibrant strength is to the body! A sickened body is without life, energy, ambition, or desire. In the same way a sickened spirit is without life, energy, ambition, or desire. A sense of goodwill is another quality of one who lives abundantly; it means that the heart is alive and functioning. It in effect, says to the world, I have no grievance. I am content with me and I am content with you. I wish you well. I express my good will to you."

Cheerfulness, goodwill, friendship, humor, and amiability--these are the qualities of one who is happy or full of joy. Contrariwise, one who is withdrawn, sour-natured, cranky, and gloomy is patently without joy.

A mother or father is just as concerned with a sickness of the heart as a sickness of the body. Both indicate that something is seriously wrong--crippling life and inhibiting growth!

## **Life, Love, Joy and Freedom**

There are four key signs of a healthy individual and family: life (verses disease or death), love (verses indifference or hatred), joy (happiness, cheerfulness, goodwill), and freedom (spontaneity, strength, capability, confidence).

The Savior focused on these four qualities. "I have come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly. . ." (John 10:10). "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full. . ." (John 15:11). "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. . ." (John 13:35). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

All four qualities enhance the others. They work together to form that rare individual who is totally free--totally at peace with himself. As parents we desire that our children grow, develop talents, learn, become---these are related to the principle of Life. We hope that our children will be considerate, loving, warm, friendly--these are related to Love. We pray for their happiness, well being. We fear that they will fall into bondage with drugs, defeating habits, or degrading lifestyles, and that consequently their freedoms will be curtailed. It becomes clear that all aspirations seem to be rooted in these four attributes: Life, Love, Joy and Freedom.

It is crucial to parenting that the Big Picture is kept in mind. The objective is not to raise smart children but whole children--happy children who are keen of intellect. The objective cannot be merely the ability to get along with others but to get along well with oneself. The objective cannot be obedience to law but obedience to Life. (The law is spelled out for those who have forgotten how to live.) The purpose of it all is not to earn a heaven in the hereafter but to learn how to create a heaven here--at least within one's own heart. Sights cannot settle on fickle approval of the world but upon approval of God. The goal is not when one is surpassing others but when being true to oneself.

Let us take a closer look at some of the lesser goals of parenting and observe that while rooted in true principles or aspirations, without a clear picture or vision, they may in fact, impede life, love, joy and freedom.

## Obedience To Law

True freedom and happiness comes as a result of liberty in law. There are laws of success in every area of living--laws of health that will lead to the strength of the body, laws of management that will lead to productivity, and so on, but in every case the law is not the end, but the means by which the end is achieved. The law is important, but greater life is the end for which the law was given. The Savior said, "I am the bread of life. . ." (John 6:35), "I am come that they might have life. . ." (John 10:10), "I am the resurrection, and the life. . ." (John 11:25), "I am the way, the truth, and the life. . ." (John 11:25).

Throughout the scriptures we note that there are those who become detoured spiritually and, instead of strive for the life, settle for compliance to law. It is as if the training program should suffice for the joy of playing the game. As the Savior said to the legalistic, academic scribes and Pharisees:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." (Matthew 23-27)

Over and over the Savior put the emphasis upon striving for life, love, joy and freedom. His commandments were simple; love God and your fellow man. He often referred to the children as examples: "Except ye. . .become as a little children. . ." (Matthew 18:3) They are the only ones among us who are naturally full of life, love, joy and freedom. They whose hearts are so open, tender, compassionate and good natured; who are so full of life, ambition and curiosity; who are

so free, outspoken, real and spontaneous. They are examples of living the spirit and not just the letter of the law.

Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27). We could apply this same rule to all law: the law was created for man; man was not created for the law. The law is a poor excuse for lack of love. The Mosaic commandments were given not as a pattern for living, but as a warning to those who had lost life. It is as if to say, "And while you're in the darkness remember not to steal, covet, commit fornication, lie, . . ." The commandments, it should be remembered were given to a people who were in the wilderness, physically and spiritually.

Character building cannot be reduced to merely the indoctrination of moral law, for, while being legally right, a person may be morally wrong.

Another danger in focusing upon the law rather than life is that it creates tunnel vision for both parents and children--a proselyting program after the order of scribes and Pharisees! They begin to see themselves and others with the squinted eye, with rule stick in hand, measuring and judging according the Law. They can loose their moral conscience for a collective or written conscience and either despair over not being able to measure up or become arrogant and self-righteous over their success. Even worse, they may trade their natural, childlike spontaneity to live and love for a programmed existence.

We have all observed the zombies who are so tightly obedient to the law that they have lost the passion to live. They appear like robots going about their business-- lifeless, humorless and devoid of goodwill. They observe carefully not to slip into the sins of commission but tramp about wantonly in the sins of omission. They protect their supposed virtue by avoiding life, sneaking about to avoid confrontation, conflict, or a chance for a courageous stand. In the law, they find security--not only security from sin, but also security from life itself. In their zealously to protect their virtue, with heads hung down carefully watching every step, they do not see the opportunities to make moral touchdowns.

The objective is not obedience to law, but obedience to the life within--in other words, to become a person of integrity. The word integrity has always held a fascination for me--it is the top of the line of virtue or goodness. It is defined as "honesty, incorruptibility, wholeness, entirety, and soundness." It suggests a person in whom the law is internal rather than external--the personification of all that is good, right and whole.

In Robert Bolt's play, "A Man For All Seasons," Sir Thomas More, who is just such a man, is imprisoned for taking a stand according to his conscience but against the law or authority of the land--the King of England, Henry the VIII. While in jail, he comes in contact with a jailer who is an example of one who turns away from a moral dilemma. When More's wife and daughter come to visit him, he pleads with the jailer to give them more time to be together. The jailer responds, "You don't want to get me into trouble. . . You don't know what you're asking, sir. You don't know how you're watched."

Again, More pleads for a few more minutes. The jailer responds, "You don't understand my position, sir, there's nothing I can do! I'm a plain, simple man and just want to keep out of trouble."

More cries to himself, "Oh, Sweet Jesus! These plain, simple men!"

This brings to mind quote by Dante, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a moment of crises, choose neutrality."

One who watched idly by while the German forces stripped their fellow human beings of dignity and life said, "They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. They came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up." (*Life*, August 28, 1989, p. 42.)

## **The Outward Show/The Inward Life**

Just as obedience to law is an incomplete aspiration for the parent or teacher of children, so also is the one found in prideful

positioning for the top spot. We see parents whose primary concern is on the outward show. From the age of one they instill within the child the cravings of competition--to be the most brilliant, the most beautiful, the most spiritual, the most popular, the best dressed, the most outstanding athlete. "I will be important because my children are important. I will be more valued because my son or daughter is a doctor, lawyer or Indian Chief! I am smart because he is smart. I am beautiful because she is beautiful. I am O.K. because my children have turned out O.K."

Then, by the age of sixteen, the brilliant, the beautiful and the best has descended into the self-centered and selfish. In their compliance with the race for first place, the qualities of love, patience, tolerance, goodwill, compassion, understanding, and wisdom are discarded.

Referring again to Bolt's play, "A Man For All Seasons," we observe Sir Thomas More, who is willing to give up all--fame and fortune---to hold onto himself and his honor, and Richard Rich, who is willing to pay any price, including his honor to achieve fame and fortune. In one of the scenes, Richard Rich begs More to employ him. He hungrily yearns for position, prestige and power.

More answers, "No."

Desperately Rich pleads again, "Employ me!"

More again replies, "No!"

"I would be steadfast." Rich responds. Sir Thomas More, cutting to the heart says, "Richard, you couldn't answer for yourself even so far as tonight."

More understands what Rich does not, that one cannot be true to another until one is true to oneself. After Sir Thomas More refuses his services Rich seeks employment elsewhere. In a downward spiral fueled by the fever of success Rich loses himself little by little, compromise by compromise, until all that is left is the gnawing of a never satisfied yearning for still more power. Perhaps the losing of one's soul is not so much a matter of an adversarial force taking it away, as we ourselves giving it away piece by piece.

Parents who instill the idea that to be acceptable one must be successful in the eyes of the world--can create an obsession that

tramples upon the sensitivities of the heart and moral fiber. Somewhere behind it is the idea of survival of the fittest. "I will succeed at any cost! I will prove that I am better, that I am smarter! You will see! You all will see!"

The danger lies not in the ambition to win, but in the ambition to win merely to justify one's existence, or to prove one's superiority over others. The key to life is growth. The key to growth is humility, curiosity, and teachableness--the desire to go forth. Humility is the ability to recognize one's need to grow; the stumbling block to growth is pride. Pride in success can therefore block future progress. Sometimes we are so anxious to teach children how to be successful that we forget to teach them how to live successfully--to love, to learn, to reach out to others, to enjoy the cultural pleasures of great literature, music, and art.

## **Summary**

Awareness of this broad picture and objective of parenting is the key to understanding the great need for adopting principles that will contribute to the life, love, joy, freedom and integrity of the child. This first principle that the goal of life and families is to have joy is the foundation for all the others. Mere indoctrination to law creates neither good parents nor happy children nor domestic tranquility in the home. But when parents focus on enhancement of character and development of integrity, with emphasis upon the never-ending creation of quality life within wonderful things can happen.

A very long time ago, as I drove my children home from our first viewing of the movie, "The Sound of Music," they all dropped off to sleep except for my firstborn, Donnie, who was then about eight. He and I, together, were caught up in the glory of the movie and the strength of character displayed. It was an intimate moment when we both shared our hope that we would one day be courageous enough to stand for virtue in the decisive hour. After that special time together, "Edlewiss" became our song. My wish for him, then and now, is that he "bloom and grow; bloom and grow forever."

The goal then, as I see it, cannot be merely indoctrination to law, but the enhancement of character and integrity.

This discussion continues in the principle on free will, conscience and disciplining in love, all of which contribute to the life, love, joy and freedom of the child.