



“...because
they had
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The Care & Feeding of Children



It is with wry amusement that I recall the naiveté of our early years in San Diego. Having just purchased our first home, we thought it might be a very nice thing to have a small garden in the back yard from which to harvest fresh vegetables for the table. We determined where in the postage-stamp yard we might situate this garden, discussed which veggies to grow, then went out and purchased our seeds and that first, critically important tool.

We bought a shovel.

No one laughed at us at the hardware store, so we had no warning about what lay in store for us. With our new shovel, packets of seeds, stakes and string, we set to the task. We measured and laid out the plot. Then I manfully set the blade of my new shovel to the earth and pushed down with the heel of my foot.

Nothing happened.

I tried again. Nothing. The blade refused to travel more than a fraction of an inch into the Southern California “soil.” We may have discussed the cost and feasibility of acquiring a pickaxe—or dynamite. I can’t remember. In any case, we made the decision not to dig

up the soil at all. We laid out our rows, scratched as best we could a shallow furrow into what millennia before had probably been soil, and carefully placed our seeds.

That turned out to be an interesting little garden. From a distance it gave the impression of neat rows sliced into a *Formica* table top. But, lo and behold, in a few weeks things did, indeed, begin to sprout. It’s the carrots I remember quite vividly: fresh green tops above the soil—stunted, tortured nubs below. We had to excavate them from the clay hardpan with a hatchet.

We are now considerably older and wiser—and we live in a place where the soil is black, and may be turned with only reasonable effort with a spade. From this soil the harvest is carried in large baskets instead of plastic baggies. In this soil the roots grow deep, and are fed by the nutrients deposited millennia ago by the receding glaciers of the ice age.

Led Away from the Light

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...

Ephesians 4:14-15

We all begin as babies—both physically and spiritually. But while we all inevitably grow up physically, not all of us grow up spiritu-

ally. Transitioning from the bottle or breast to baby food, then on to breads and vegetables and meats is pretty much taken for granted. We pass through these developmental stages as a natural course and no one finds our progress remarkable; no one stands up and loudly celebrates our move from one to the next—except, of course, our dotting parents and kin.

Our passage through the stages of *spiritual* maturity, however, are not so readily assumed or taken for granted. This transition from babe to mature adult does not happen without some effort, time, and sense of purpose. It does not happen accidentally. Even a child born and weaned in the wild would as a natural course move from milk to solid food; the same cannot be said for the spiritual babe.

I have never met an adult whose diet consisted entirely of milk from a nipple, or baby food spooned from tiny *Gerber* jars. But I have met a rather large number of adults whose spiritual diet consisted entirely of endless repetitions of religious pabulum—people whose roots are so shallow that they cannot bear the blinding light of the word, much less the siren song of the world's system. Under the light of the first, they turn away, either with disinterest or a rejection of its discomfiting illumination. Under the enticements of the second, they succumb and are ultimately led away from the light, for of the two, it is the easier path.

Putting Down Roots

And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."

Matthew 13:3-6

Without the "Root of Jesse" (Christ) in a life, it withers away into a lifeless eternity alienated from Him. But even *with* His saving grace—even with His atonement and justification, and the indwelling Holy Spirit—a life without solid and deep roots sunk into God's truth can wither into impotence. Nonproductive. Lifeless. Useless. A stunted and tortured carrot cut from hard clay is an unhappy sight—and not suited for the dinner table. A stunted life, distanced from God by a lazy, inattentive spirit is worse than useless. It may, indeed, spend eternity in paradise, but while it trudges the paths of earth it becomes not just an empty vessel, but a distracting stumbling block to others.

Real babies are cute and charming, attractive. *Adult* babies are repellent.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity...

Hebrews 5:12-6:1a

There is no special trick to raising spiritual children. Leave them alone and they will remain children on their own. The harder job is raising spiritual *adults*. The mechanics of the process are many and varied. Yes, we can list Bible Study and Sunday School and sermons and worship and music and prayer. These are basic and necessary.

But the hardest part of becoming a spiritual adult is the starting, for it takes a change of *heart*. As one does not become a Christian just by attending church, the Christian does not deepen his roots, thereby growing up in the Lord, by ticking off items on a spiritual Do List: "Today I will read my Bible for ten minutes, pray for five, attend a prayer meeting at seven o'clock." As vital as these are, without the change of heart, they are little more than busywork.

Believers begin the process of putting down deep and lasting roots on their knees. It is a form of worship, acknowledging the preeminence and worth-ship of God while confessing our own bankrupt estate. Just as we came to Christ initially by admitting our need for Him, we come again declaring our desire for more of Him to be instilled in the rootless shell of our earthly life.

Spiritual adults tread lightly upon this earth, for they are always reaching higher. That desire, that yearning, begins before the throne, asking the God who once and for all changed our permanent address, to change us once again: to turn our heart away from its love of earthly life to a love—a passion—for Him. dsj

John
[the Baptist]
answered and
said, "A man
can receive
nothing
unless it has
been given
him from
heaven."
John 3:27

Divine truth is of the nature of spirit and for that reason can be received only by spiritual revelation. "Except it be given him from heaven."

God made man in His own image and placed within him an organ by means of which he could know spiritual things. When man sinned that organ died. "Dead in sin" is a description not of the body nor yet of the intellect, but of the organ of God-knowledge within the human soul. Now men are forced to depend upon another and inferior organ and one furthermore which is wholly inadequate to the purpose. I mean, of course, the mind as the seat of his powers of reason and understanding.

Man by reason cannot know God; he can only know about God. Through the light of nature man's moral reason may be enlightened, but the deeper mysteries of God remain hidden to him until he has received illumination from above.

When the Spirit illuminates the heart, then a part of the man sees which never saw before; a part of him knows which never knew before, and that with a kind of knowing which the most acute thinker cannot imitate. He knows now in a deep and authoritative way, and what he knows needs no reasoned proof. His experience of knowing is above reason, immediate, perfectly convincing and inwardly satisfying.

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