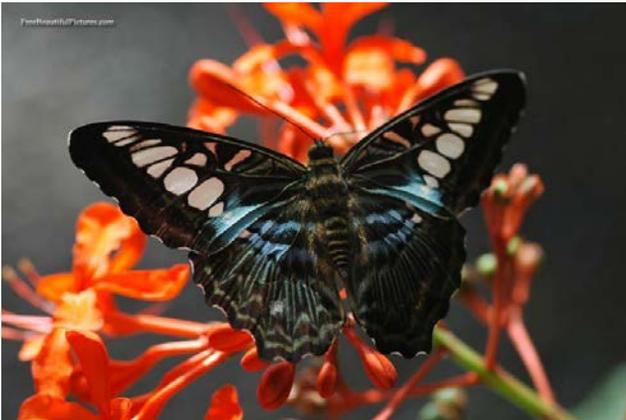


Weekly Encouragement

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Parenting Guilt Trip

By Rev. Peter Eng



"I never missed my son's soccer games," a Christian parent declares with obvious pleasure. That is wonderful!

Then I look around the room at some single parents who struggle with parenting while paying the bills. They look down in shame. I see the stony faced silence of less fortunate families who struggle to make ends meet, and don't have the money to send their son for soccer. Others work extra hours so their children can have the frills but that means they don't have time to go to their children's games.

It makes me want to reach out to these and say, "It's OK that you cannot make the same statement. You don't have to take a guilt trip as though you are less of a Christian parent when you cannot afford or cannot attend your children's events."

I don't know how we got here. Why do

Christian preachers and authors seem to all agree that good Christian parenting requires us to be present in all our children's activities?

Christian parenting is about bringing up our children in the faith. It is about setting an example in Christian living. It is about the weighty matters.

In some instances we hide our failures in weighty matters by substituting them with the trivial. In the OT, God's people substituted loving God and neighbor with rituals. And God often called them back to the substance of faith, not just the expressions of faith.

I am not suggesting that parents who attend their children's activities are neglecting their children's spiritual development, or are trivial. Being with your children is a good expression of involved parenting. But it is not the substance.

The substance in Christian parenting is our children's spiritual development. Christian parents have not neglected their duty when they are not able to show up for every event.

Our priority should be the substance.

What I find interesting is the general silence in Scripture about parenting, with the exception of our children's spiritual development. Conversely, we find

injunctions for children to honor and to care for their parents (the fifth commandment).

We dare not ask the question that stares us in the face. The politically incorrect, but spiritually correct question: "Are our children false gods?" And the corollary question: "Do Christians promote the idolatry of children under the guise of Christian parenting?"

Idolatry usually involves something good. The idol is often a gift from God. It is so good that we worship the gift rather than the Giver. It is easy to justify the idolatry of children. We say we must not neglect our children, which is certainly true, but we proceed not only to care for them but also to realign every effort for their comfort, good grades, self-esteem, etc. There is need for true Christian parenting. But it is only tangentially related to attending soccer games.

There are social pressures to worship our children. This takes different forms in different societies. In America a generational thinking has HR dealing with young employees who think that as long as they show up, they deserve to be paid. They think the company they work in exists for them. I wonder why.

The Christian parent who has the luxury to attend all his children's events should do so. But the focus of Christian parenting is the spiritual development. It is a high calling. How many among us truly love the Lord of God with all our heart, and soul and might; and teach it diligently to our children? I know I have not talked about the command of God when we sit in the house, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up ([Deut 6:4-7](#)). I suspect I am more concerned with expressing good parenting than the actual spiritual development of my children.

I won't go on a guilt trip when I miss a child's event. I would encourage parents

who are struggling with the day-to-day survival issues not to compare with the Joneses who seem to have all the time in the world. Explain to your children that you need to work to provide for them, to keep the roof over the head and food on the table. Teach them there is a scarcity of resources. Teach them that the one-child parent is different from four-child parent.

Too many parents are already trying hard not to feel guilty about the gap between what they want to provide for their children and what they are able to provide. Parent, the Lord knows your labor. Refine and perfect it towards spiritual goals, but there is no need for a guilt trip over social expectations.

Go for the substance of Christian parenting. Never mind if your expressions are lacking.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.