
It Takes a Village

Hebrews 3:12-13

Russ Kennedy

Introduction How could this be? Listen to these excerpts from the news:

(MSN/NBC) On April 20, 1999 two high school students in Littleton, Colorado went on a shooting spree in the "safe" confines of a suburban high school. Both of the young men involved in this tragedy had undergone "counseling" and "anger Management counseling" during the previous year. The leader was on antidepressants. Their marching into school one day and massacring their school mates should have been predicted and prevented.

(CBS/AP) A woman accused of drowning her three children cried and wiped her eyes Thursday as a judge read the first-degree murder charges against her and told her she could be eligible for the death penalty. Amanda L. Hamm, 27, did not enter a plea. Neither did her boyfriend, Maurice Lagrone Jr., 28, who is also charged in the case. The children drowned Sept. 2 when the car they were in plunged into Clinton Lake. Hamm and Lagrone are each charged with nine counts of first-degree murder. Authorities have not said what they believe happened that day at the lake or why they believe Hamm's children were intentionally killed.

It was a cold day in Chicago. Three elementary age boys are playing together. Suddenly the youngest boy falls out of the window. Several stories up. He plunges to his death. To everyone's shock and dismay, the police investigation uncovers that the other two boys threw him out of the window. How could this happen? Where were their parents? Could the cold blooded murder of a playmate be attributed to some horrendous failure in parenting?

What is to be done? The reactions to these terrible events cover the whole spectrum. Words flow across pages, fill books, articles and web sites. People wring their hands, make some noise and then go on with life. Because of such extreme failure in parenting, there must be some extreme change in parenting.

How will we respond? How will we rise up as a culture, as a community of people living as neighbors? Where will parents turn they are in trouble? Did all the counseling prevent the Columbine massacre? How did Andrea Yates end up drowning her children when she was in a religious community of loving friends and neighbors? How does she come to the point that she thinks her drowning those kids was a way of protecting them from danger?

Whose voice will give us answers?

Contemporary Thinking on Community

Examining the Village's Voice

A number of years ago, Hilary Clinton brought into the popular idiom at well know African proverb. She entitled her vision of parenting and child-rearing, *It Takes a Village*. Mrs. Clinton articulated a powerful and winsome presentation that took the proverb and used it as a metaphor for her statist vision.

Its Attractive Presentation

“Imagine a country in which nearly all children between the ages of three and five attend preschool in sparkling classrooms, with teachers recruited and trained as child care professionals. Imagine a country that conceives of child care as a program to 'welcome' children into the larger community and 'awaken' their potential for learning and growing.” H. Clinton, *It Takes a Village*.

Or consider this:

“Children are like the tiny figures at the center of the nesting dolls for which Russian folk artists are famous. The children are cradled in the family, which is primarily responsible for their passage from infancy to adulthood. But around the family are the larger settings of neighborhood, school, church, workplace, community, culture, economy, society, nation, and world, which affect children directly or through the well-being of their families.” *Op. cit.*

Now, this all sounds well and good. In fact, I would argue that some of what she is observing is not a radically new vision, but rather the nature of the way things are. She is seeing, in the midst of fallenness, the outlines of God's design.

But all is not well in the village. Many unbelievers saw through her dream and recognized it for the nightmare it really is.

“This then is the paradox of Ms Clinton's book: she extols the family, the village and the Russian folk doll, but at every turn she seeks to replace the layers that surround our children with a one-to-one relationship between them and government. For all the lip service she pays to traditional families and communities, her ultimate faith seems to reside only in government. In effect, since she's even chosen a life in government--first as a spouse and now as a legislator in her own right--we might say she trusts only herself to tell us how to raise children. Maybe that's the point of the whole exercise, because what this book is really telling us is one simple thing: it takes Hillary Clinton to raise a child.” Review of *It Takes a Village*.

One even responded with, "It takes a village to raise a village idiot." Cooper Wiseman.

Its Philosophical Roots

The philosophical roots, for many like Mrs. Clinton, are in the idea of government as our mother and father, our protector and our provider. The effect is to take the very limited role God has assigned government and expand to be the all omnipotent hand. Government becomes god. The village then is not uncles and aunts, loving neighbors, friends and families. The village is the power of the chief and the witch doctor to compel communal ownership.

Now it is almost trite in Christian circles to attack the ever increasing and dominating role of government in our lives. This problem is energized by two inescapable realities. Sinners are in government. Government enables the power and control some sinners crave. The result is that government tends to attract the kind of sinners who crave power and control. Since sinners tend to be in rebellion against the restrictions God places, then that causes them to expand the role of government to exceed the restrictions God has placed on it.

Its Practical Results

What practical consequences can we see from this worldly view of the village?

There is the ever increasing intrusion of government into the culture – its home, business, religious life. This is everywhere in laws, regulations, taxes, fees and government certifications of vocations.

There is an ever increasing dependence upon government to shield people from the consequences of their choices. This is so evident in the welfare system and Social Security system.

There is an ever increasing disregard, disobedience and denial of even the legitimate role of government. This is a result of the impact of law on depravity. The solution to moral failure is not the implementation of new and better laws, but rather moral reformation in the heart and character.

Sadly, what I have just described becomes the functional model for a lot of parenting. Parents assert ever increasing rules, regulations, control with an increasing dependence on the parents for everything with the result of ever increasing of disregard, disrespect and disobedience to parents.

Evaluating the Christian Responses

So how do Christians tend to respond? Here is an example from a poem by Glenn Conjurske.

It Takes A Village

It takes a village (so we're told), to raise a child today.
It takes a village (we reply), to steal his heart away,
To purge old-fashioned do's and don'ts from his enlightened mind,
To leave old fashioned Ma and Pa a hundred years behind.

It takes a village, verily, to teach some mother's son,
To steal and gamble, smoke and swear, and vandalize for fun.
His mother didn't teach him that! His father? No, not he.
It takes a village to corrupt, a village, verily.

It takes a village, this we know, to teach the maidens sweet,
To dress and act, to look and talk, like women of the street.
It takes a village, not a doubt, to teach a maiden mild,
To save the monkeys, owls, and whales, and kill her unborn child.

It takes a village public school, some subtle classroom chats,
To teach the little boys and girls to act like alley cats.
To teach them of the birds and bees, without morality,
To teach them what to do, and how, and tell them they are free.

It takes a village, yes indeed, to brainwash all the youth,
With notions and with fallacies, In place of sense and truth.
Abortion rights! The right to die! The rights of animals!
Creative spelling! Unisex! The rights of criminals!

It takes a village, well we know, to turn their minds away,
To stand for fancied "children's rights", and parents' rights deny.
To honor human nature less, And trees and rivers more.
To sacrifice to Mother Earth, and Father God ignore.

"It takes a village," so they say, but something more they mean.
United Nations. Washington. The liberal machine.
Society. The "Brave New World." The socialistic scheme.
The global ideology. The New World Order dream!

Glenn Conjurske

I want to take a moment to classify the responses,

Integration – Adopt with Adjustments

There is a kind of Christian response that integrates this socialistic, statist view of parenting and child-rearing, making adjustments only where it is blatantly unbiblical. We are not much exposed to it, but an even cursory search of the Web and popular religious media demonstrates this.

Individualism – Oppose with Opposite

Many Christians respond with a sort of rugged, retrograde individualism. They will not be dependent nor accountable to anyone. They are going to engage the culture and involve themselves as Christians in it, but they will do so alone and largely separate from other believers in our parenting. They will do it largely on their own.

Isolationism – Retreat into Refuges

The opposite extreme turns homes into retreats and refuges. People shield themselves and their children from most influence from the outside. While they may take counsel from the church's ordained leadership, they will generally parent as they see fit.

Usually, people simply function on one of the above, but don't say it. Even in writing it out like this, it rubs. Our problem is that we do allow the world to pour us into its mold – sometimes by adopting it and sometimes by reacting just in the opposite direction.

Biblical Thinking on Community

What then does the Bible teach us about parenting together? Does the Bible support one of the above reactions? Do we simply reject the idea of corporate responsibility in parenting? Do we hand over our parenting to the church for it to do what we will not or cannot?

Its Canonical Development

How does the Bible develop this theme? I see it in four major steps in the Scripture.

Grounded in the Trinity

God is a community. One of the basic insights from the doctrine of the Trinity is the idea of personhood and community. God is three persons in one essence. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet one God. There is an interaction, relationship and role subordination among the persons yet an essential equality and unity in God's essence.

The idea of a community where individual persons work together in relationships toward shared goals is grounded in the nature of God. Human community is derived from this truth. We are imaging and reproducing what God is in His very essence.

It is not surprising then that God has designed people to live in the context of relationships defined as community. What is significant though is that God is the ultimate environment of all community. He is also the determiner of the extent and limitations of each sphere.

Illustrated in Redemptive History

This is clearly worked out in the Bible itself. From the Garden of Eden through to the return from exile, God's people do not live in isolation. They

Genesis 1

are to live in community. It is punishment for Cain to be exiled to wandering. Man lives in clans and in cities almost from the beginning.

As the Bible unfolds, God rejects rebellious communities, such as Babel. He recognizes the patriarchal households and clans as communities in which righteousness is cultivated or sin is exacerbated. Then, in establishing Israel as a nation, God also emphasizes the need and the dangers of community. But the overarching thrust is for believing Jews to walk with God, not in isolation, but together as God's people.

The trajectory through redemptive history is to continually define the need for community until we arrive at the New Covenant community of the gathered church. Here is a community of people who may not be geographical neighbors, but who are to live as a believing covenanted community within the larger culture around them. This believing community was to gather for teaching, worship, accountability, mission and so on. But it was to exist as a network of dependent relationships supporting one another for holiness and strengthening one another for an evangelistic engagement with the culture, the community in which it existed.

So, the community of the church is an expression of the Godhead, an extension of our in heaven status and an expectation of true believers. As we see it in the New Testament, it was to be a community within the culture engaged with it, not a compound with walls around it to keep the culture out. It is to be a loving neighborhood believers committed to one another for each other's good and God's glory. In a moment, we will examine one paragraph out of a huge cluster of paragraphs, that will shape and sharpen us for parenting in community.

Culminated in Eternity

Revelation 21

What God launched in the Garden, He brings to full and final expression in eternity future. The vision of Revelation 20 and following is that of a new heavens and new earth where God's redeemed people rule, live and work. But they do so as a perfect community of the redeemed. The bride is a city. So the idea of a network of relationships for righteousness is not only a matter for time, but a great expectation in eternity as well.

Its Practical Design

Hebrews 3:12-13

But let us take up this important text in Hebrews. Tonight, we will take up its companion text later in Hebrews and work out detailed, practical steps of action to implement in our own church community, parenting for righteousness.

The Heart Problem

(v.12)

The Bible warns that *OUR PROBLEM IS A HEART PROBLEM*. Parenting issues are heart issues. Our problem in parenting is not our children, our situation, our upbringing and so on. Our problem is how we respond from our heart in the midst of these things. God uses all of the situational stuff to expose our hearts. You parent from the heart. So the question is: are your beliefs and wants shaped by the Scriptures?

The Bible also warns us that *OUR PROBLEM IS ONE OF FAITH AND UNBELIEF*. Hebrews is developing idea that disobedience is a fruit of disbelief. Look at Hebrews 3:18-19. They could not enter because of disobedience (v.18) arising from unbelief (v.19). Their unbelieving hearts were exposed by the wilderness, by the challenges of entering Canaan and by the situations God brought them into. That they were unbelieving is evident from their complaining, their hankering to return to Egypt, their rejection of the difficulties God brought them, their rebellion against their leadership and their failure cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. So, your parenting issues will arise from a heart that does not believe what God says. You will know that because of disobedience. You will know it because of anger, frustrations, hopelessness, fear. You will express it in words and ways with your children that do not please God. And while your behavior and feelings must change, they must be changed first at the heart level.

The Bible warns us that *PERSISTENT HEART UNBELIEF IS EVIDENCE OF NO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD*. If we are unwilling or unable to address the issues of the heart, to believe God in an obeying way, it exposes us being, yes, unbelievers. Being a Christian begins with an initial act of belief in God and bowing to Him. But being a Christian means that you are continuing to repent by believing and bowing to God.

The Bible warns us to *PAY ATTENTION TO THIS FACT*. We must consciously focus on whether we are believing God in an obeying way. We must listen to what we are thinking, what we believe and want. The flow of words in our heart must be heard, examined, repented of and replaced when necessary. Most Christian parenting needs to turn from a primary emphasis on the outward to a primary emphasis on the inward.

The Biblical Prescription

(v.13)

So, what does this have to do with “it takes a village?” What does this have to do with living in the midst of community as Christians? Verse 13 gives us the Biblical prescription. We are to watch and warn one another.

Look at several key words that make up this prescription. What I am about to say is going to be unpacked in view of parenting. But parenting is one sphere, one category, one area of our lives in which we need one another, we need the counsel and correction of living in community.

WE ARE TO EXHORT ONE ANOTHER. This word conveys the sense of helping people move forward, often with encouragement. We hear the word “coaching” used a lot today. It is the kind of engagement with one another that recognizes “we are all needing help and we are all helpers.” P. Tripp The ministry is not one of condemnation, judgment, imputing motives, criticism and so on. It is a humble, “Can I be of help?” as well as, “I need your help and insight.” This ministry of exhortation with one another in the context of church/community relationships is the antidote and the prescription for the disease of unbelief. Therefore, it is a one anothering in love, encouragement, insight, wisdom and experience. It is not the application of my way as the only way, but being an instrument of seeing – of seeing themselves and see-

ing what God says and then working it out together. It is not a ministry of giving lists of do's and don'ts – it is the privilege of thinking through Scripture and situations so that God's wisdom emerges.

WE ARE TO DO IT EVERY DAY. Here is the really challenging thing. We are to do this any time we can say it is “Today”. Is this spiritual nagging? No, but it is an expression of spiritual love and concern. Again, we tend to think of church as this periodic event with the people who are there. You need to change that thinking. You are the church. This body of people are a gathered church. Your life is intricately woven into the lives of everyone here *whether you realize it or not*. I am convinced that we need each other much more than we think and certainly than we do. Parenting is one of the most challenging things you can do. You need the regular, yes if possible, daily exhortation of people who love you and you love who are in the midst of the mess with you.

WE ARE TO DO IT BECAUSE OF SIN'S DECEITFULNESS. Every day exhortation is needed because sin fools us. Sin deceives us. We are easily deceived by our sin. We need each other as God's means of seeing ourselves so that we are not snookered by sin. Parenting is particularly vulnerable to sin's deceptions because our children can easily become our idols.

So let me ask. Have you, in the last 6 months, had serious conversations with anyone else in this church in relationship to parenting or child-rearing? We have many mature, seasoned saints here. We have many young parents just beginning the journey. We parents who have done well over the years and some who have seen the consequences of unbiblical parenting. Let's watch over and warn one another so that we will not be deceived by sin, we will be encouraged to believe God and exhorted with practical steps for daily obedience.

In conclusion, let's highlight some lessons.

Conclusion

We must have a Biblical view of parenting that includes serious interaction with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Again, the village is your church, your network of Christ-treasuring, Bible loving, holy living relationships. Do you have them?

We must humble ourselves to be helped and have the courage to be a helper. This is not about a judgmental declaration, but about a loving discussion. This is a way of carrying out a love, know, speak and do engagement with people.

We need all the means of grace so that we will live by faith. May God give us the grace to see and feel our own need for each other.

Does it take a village? No, it takes a church – a loving community of committed people who purpose to learn God's Word, love God and His people, to live by faith and lean on one another.