

MAKE LIFE HARD FOR YOUR KIDS

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



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There’s a parenting memory that makes my heart ache whenever it pops into my head. We were brand new to the neighborhood and all my 5-year-old son wanted to do was hop into the game of backyard football that was happening next door. But the 6 and 7-year-olds who had organized the game didn’t let him play. Too little. Too young. So there he sat. . . cross-legged. . . chin in his hands. . . watching, wishing, and defeated from our side of the property line.

That was only one of an immeasurable multitude of parenting moments I would encounter where I wondered whether or not it was best to intervene on behalf of my kids in order to make things easier on

them by eliminating a difficulty. Nobody wants to see their kids suffer and hurt.

In today’s world, parental intervention and running interference for our kids has become standard practice. We hover at the ready in order to protect kids from the difficulties of life’s responsibilities, and it’s called **“helicopter parenting.”** We push forward on behalf of our kids in order to keep them ahead of their peers, and it’s called **“snowplow parenting.”** And, when we remove obstacles in their path to make life easier it’s called **“lawnmower parenting.”** There are other monikers as well.



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But are these practices that make for good parenting? And, are we preparing our kids to handle the inevitable difficulties of life in ways that bring honor and glory to God while showing respect, responsibility, and maturity? Research is consistently pointing to the fact that in our effort to make life easier for our kids we actually leave them ill-prepared for adult life. We make life *more* difficult for them as we steal away the opportunities provided by childhood and adolescence to mature and grow emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. We undermine their resiliency, foster continued dependence, and fail to prepare them for life as adults.

Before Jesus launched into his adult ministry he was led by the Spirit into a time of fasting and preparation. When we take time to read the Gospel accounts of what is known as “The Temptation of Jesus” (Matthew 4, Mark 1, Luke 4), we see him experiencing what Elisabeth Elliot refers to as the “three elements essential to spiritual growth”: *stress, discipline, and choice*.

In the wilderness Jesus was shaped and prepared for life through the *stress* of physical hardships and loneliness. While in the wilderness, he engaged for forty days in the difficult *discipline* of fasting. And in the midst of these difficulties, he was confronted by Satan and tempted three times to compromise, which necessitated making difficult *choices*.

Parents, there is a powerful parenting lesson we can learn from the perfect Father who struck the perfect balance between doing too much and doing too little for His Son. We must allow our kids to encounter and navigate the normal stresses, strains, and difficulties of life. We must look for ways to encourage them to develop disciplined habits that will prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life. And, while we must teach them to make wise choices, we must also allow them to make those choices and then learn from whatever may come. . . both good or bad consequences. . . in the wake of those choices.

Do your kids a favor and allow them to experience and navigate the inevitable hardships of life as you walk *beside* them to support and encourage, rather than *in front of, behind, or over* them in ways that steal these valuable opportunities for growth.

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