

Capturing the Heart of Your Child Part 2

Dr. Andy Meeko

Something is seriously wrong with the traditional education system. By the age of fifteen, 80% of kids are deemed as losers. In this setting, their true qualities and gifts have usually been ignored. Instead of a sense of destiny, they have a feeling of being categorized as inferior. Parents have the power to change this.

It is my belief that the primary pillar of parenting is to capture the heart of a child. There are two parts to this first (the topic of the last article) we must understand them (After all, God knows even how many hairs are on our head. Luke 12:7). Second we must delight in them (After all, God considers us His treasured possession. Deut 7:6). Perhaps the most powerful impression a parent can give a child is for them to grow up hearing, “I understand you and I think you’re great!” This will fortify them against any debilitating categorizations of society.

Children of today are faced with the onslaught of being under-valued. Tragically in Japan, many people do not see children as a joy, but as a burden. In 1999 the birthrate hit a historical low. Why is this? Perhaps people are worried about the cost. Education costs for public school kindergarten through university amount to ¥10,200,000 (for private schooling through PhD level the cost is ¥48,200,000). Or maybe people feel it is too much work raising children. In a recent Aera survey 45% of people responded “子育ては損”. And grievously many children are even abused. Aviva, an internet magazine, indicates that last year, child abuse in Japan increased 70% over the previous year.

Besides all this, many children grow up in the context of toxic shame. Shame is a powerful motivator and often used in disciplining children, in fact, in Japan it could be considered the dominant motivator. Inappropriate shame is a poison to the soul. It is at the root of many problems, including addictions. Through addictions people seeks to ease the pain of their shame. Eating disorders are also shame based. Girls plagued with anorexia can destroy their systems to the point that they can vomit at will. This behavior can kill them in an instant. Sowing seeds of shame in children can literally destroy their life. Even though many of us were raised with shame, as parents we need to discover a new way- the way of motivating, not with shame, but

love. For parents who have never experienced such a model it may mean a huge process of reorientation.

Unconditional love always communicates acceptance of the person. When a parent thinks their child is great, they begin saying things like:

“I love you.”

“I trust you.”

“I believe in you.”

“I am proud of you.”

“I am for you.”

“I want to be with you.”

These statements are very close to the heart of God.

I read about an amazing study done in the slums of Baltimore, Maryland. A sociology class at the university examined the lives of 200 boys in growing up in the slums- boys who had little hope. The conclusion of the study was that these boys had “no chance” of success- their futures were doomed. 25 years later another professor found this study and began searching for those same boys, who were now adults, to validate the study. The professor found 180 of the boys and was astounded to see that 176 had achieved more than ordinary success. When asked why they did so well, the common reply was, “There was this teacher...” The curious professor then located the teacher and asked her about her secret with those boys. She gave a big smile, and simply said, “I loved those boys.”

My family came to Japan in 1947. My father had a unique and very successful work and many consider him to be one of the greatest missionaries in Japan’s history. One of his outstanding characteristics was that he loved and whole-heartedly believed in the people of Japan. Even when we were back in the US and he would meet someone from Japan he would get so excited he would almost dance. People knew he loved them and would do almost anything for him. (Love is a powerful motivator.) Eighteen years ago my father was called Home. At his memorial service on Maui, several pastors from Japan gave testimony. Interestingly, each one said that he loved them the most. My father had captured their hearts.

In the Bible we see a strong model of delighting in a child. At Jesus’ baptism, God the Father could not resist but rip open the veil of heaven and declare audibly, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus straightway carried that affirmation with Him in the 40 days of temptation, and will throughout the rest of Eternity. Also, in the Old

Testament, we see the great delight of Jacob for his son Joseph. Jacob was so enamored with Joseph that he gave him a richly ornamented robe as a symbol of that love. Of course, everybody doesn't need to know how much we delight in our kids, but our kids do need to know that we are secretly, complete おやばか.

There are forces in these times that are planning the destruction of your child. The last thing the enemy wants is for your child to have a loving, healthy connection to you. Our best defense is to convince them that we are delighted with them. The words we plant in their hearts now will be the foundation of their lives, and even the lives of their children.

I can never forget the testimony of Mary Ann Bird- a little girl who grew up doubting if she was loveable:

“I grew up knowing I was different from others- and hated it. I was born with a split palate, and when I entered grade school other kids told me plainly how I looked to others; split lip, a twisted nose, and crooked teeth, a little girl who garbled words when she tried to talk.

When other kids would ask me: “What happened to your lip?” I would say; “I fell and cut it on a piece of glass.” Because I thought it was more acceptable to have had an accident, than to have been born that way. I was sure that no one besides my family could ever love me.

Then I started the second grade, and my teacher was a lady that everybody adored. Her name was Mrs. Leonard- she was short, round, warm, and radiant.

Every year we had a hearing exam, and Mrs. Leonard did the test for our whole class. Everyone took turns standing by the door, covering one ear, and she would sit at her desk and whisper something. Things like, ‘The sky is blue.’ or ‘Are those new shoes?’ Then we would have to repeat what she said.

Finally it was my turn. I stood by the door, waiting for the words. Words that certainly God Himself gave her, words that changed my life-- ‘I wish you were my little girl.’”

There is a little girl or boy in each one of us that longs to hear words like that. Maybe we never did hear those words, but it is possible to give our children that blessing. None of us will ever do a perfect job of parenting, but we can decide that our home will be different. We can make choices to say to our child, “I understand you and I think you're great.” Only then will they give

us the treasure of their heart.