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### Safeguarding Our Children from Abuse

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# Safeguarding Our Children from Abuse



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CHILDREN ARE A TREASURE ENTRUSTED TO US BY THE LORD (PSALM 17:14). FOR THIS REASON, PARENTS ARE TO LOVE, EMPOWER AND PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN.

This may sound like a simple task, but in this age of uncertainty and complexity it can be a daunting task. Many parents have the best of intentions and would never knowingly abuse or neglect their children or expose them to such exploitation from others. And yet, the Center for Disease Control reports that “at least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States. This is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported. In 2020, 1,750 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States.” Child abuse includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Neglect is also included and is the failure to meet a child’s basic physical and emotional needs.

Safeguarding our children from abuse and neglect is a major focus of true, loving, Christian parenting. Deuteronomy 5:9 instructs us that the iniquity of the parents is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. What this means practically is that whatever issues a parent does not address get passed along to their children. Our natural tendency is to try to bury our pain or to medicate it as a way of making ourselves feel better. However, research on childhood trauma is clear that this avoidance results in chronic physical illness, emotional dysfunction and self-destructive behaviors including addictions (Felitti, et. al.). Therefore, the best gift that parents can give their children is to break the cycle of abuse by addressing their own issues.

Because we tend to parent the same way that we were parented, it is important that parents be intentional about learning about healthy parenting. There are many misconceptions, for example,

about what constitutes healthy discipline of children. Some parents are hypervigilant about protecting their children from abuse. They may become what is called “helicopter parents.” They try to control every aspect of their child’s life, and this is generally done not with evil intent but out of fear of what may become of their child if they, as parents, don’t manage their lives. Ideally, children will be taught how to make healthy decisions for themselves. The best way to safeguard our children is to love them so well that they will feel safe coming to us to talk about whatever is happening in their lives. So many feel shame about what has happened that they suffer silently and endure the abuse they have suffered without getting the help they need. Churches can play a positive role by holding educational events related to healthy parenting. This might include issues such as the potential dangers of unregulated social media, teaching children healthy boundaries, and what constitutes healthy relationships with peers as well as with adults. ■

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