

The Over-Mothered, Under-Fathered Generation

by Tim Moon

I had an interesting experience recently that demonstrated to me the nurturing drive possessed by mothers. I was at the high school campus when a young male student informed me that he was not feeling well. His mom was at the grammar campus so he asked me if I could inform her of this fact when I got to the grammar school. He looked fine to me; no bleeding, no visible weakness or pain, and no broken bones. So I asked him the following question: If you were a soldier preparing to go into battle would you be sick enough for the general to excuse you? Years of listening to excuses designed to get one out of school have taken their toll on my compassion. As I suspected, he answered "no." After returning to the grammar school I asked someone to tell his mom that her son was complaining a little about being sick but that I thought he was fine. Moments later, the mother, visibly concerned, hurried into my office with her cell phone in one hand and a thermometer in the other. She informed me she had to go to the high school and check on her son. This surprised me because I thought I had effectively communicated the nature of her son's condition. I did not have the heart to tell her that we already had thermometers at the high school.

This incident illustrated for me, in an innocent and comical way, the tendency of moms to overreact to their children's difficulties. The world would be a dark and dangerous place without nurturing mothers

like this. In many ways, human survival is dependent on mothers who possess this natural drive to nurture and care for children when they are vulnerable. Had this responsibility been left to men alone, humanity would have perished long ago. That said, it is equally important to remember that this drive to nurture that contributes to the proper care of vulnerable children, can stifle initiative and prevent important character development in teenagers. The desire to protect them from danger that they are not capable of defending themselves from is misused when it is applied to protecting them from challenges that they are capable of working through themselves. It is critical that we not protect them from these challenges, especially when they are difficult and painful.

I think that one of the greatest obstacles in Christian education today is getting the moms to start letting go and motivating the dads to take hold firmly as the children transition from grammar school to jun-

ior or read more into tears than they should. Finally, they are often better suited to see immediate challenges in light of the bigger long-term picture which allows for important perspective.

I am growing increasingly concerned that we may be raising the next generation of Christians in a way that assures weakness and fragility in the face of challenges. I fear that they are being over-mothered and under-fathered, or, perhaps more accurately, overly nurtured, pampered, and protected and under disciplined and under prepared for the real challenges that accompany adulthood. I believe that the tendency among parents, predominantly mothers, to overprotect their teenage children from the pain, discipline, failure, risks and challenges inherent in reality is actually protecting them from experiences that are vital to their development of character and perspective. This scares me! In our haste to protect our children from the ravishing difficulties of this

world are we actually preparing them to be ravished by these difficulties when they leave us? The goal should be to expose them to great difficulties and challenges when they are still with

us, so we can offer valuable insight and perspective through the pain. We should not be protecting them from the pain. We need to cry with them rather than remove the circumstances that are causing the tears.

Last year my daughter went

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ior high and high school. Just as the drive to nurture and protect is embedded in the nature of women, the nature to discipline and lead is embedded in men. Men are generally much more adept at encouraging children to take risks and fail. They are also far less likely to take the failures of their children personally

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through a very difficult time in her life. She was in her junior year and taking a full load that involved classes that were much more difficult than she had ever had to face before.

S o m e -
times she
would
have three
to four
hours of
homework
a night. In

addition, she played volleyball and swam competitively which required three to four hours of practice daily. We entertained the idea of her dropping a class or two, which she did not absolutely need, so she would have more time but we did not feel that was right and she did not want to stop swimming. To add to this, she had always been a motivated student and desired A's in everything. We had many tearful nights as she adjusted to the reality of these conflicting desires. These nights were very difficult on her mom. One day, she and I were sitting at the pool waiting for one of her practices to start and she said something that I will never forget. She said, "I realize now, Dad, that success is not about getting A's in everything but in making choices, setting priorities, and then doing the best you can." I knew then that she was ready for college in spite of a less than perfect GPA. But more importantly, I knew she was ready for life.

Had I protected her from this challenge she would never have learned this lesson and I would have been effectively protecting her from the development of needed strength

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and perspective. Wild animals that are fed by well-meaning and nur-

turing humans, are actually protected from the development of needed strength and skill to survive in the wild. They are condemned to a life of permanent dependence. We cannot do this to our children. We must allow them to strengthen themselves on life's difficulties and challenges while they are with us so they can survive in the wild when they leave. Dads need to take charge of this process as children transition into adolescence, and moms need to start letting go. We cannot release them into a world that is desperately in need of biblical truth and toughness when they are weak, dependent, and unable to provide for this need. We cannot prepare them for war by protecting them from the privilege of persevering through difficulty. We must expose them to the pain of learning and release them as disciples who are prepared to fight and who having done everything to stand; stand therefore.

Tim Moon has served as headmaster of Annapolis Christian Academy in Corpus Christi for the last 4 years. He is currently transitioning to a new school. He will assume the responsibilities of headmaster at Summit Christian Academy in Yorktown, Virginia, in June of 2007.

He and Anita, his wife of 19 years, have four beautiful children ages 16, 15, 12, and 4.

Tim is a life-long learner who loves to read, especially about subjects related to philosophy, history, apologetics, leadership, and education. He is also a basketball enthusiast. Tim holds a BA from Washington State University and an MA from Portland State University.

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