

May 2011
Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
Marilyn Sharpe

SIMPLIFY ... for Jesus' Sake!

Simplify, simplify, simplify.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I normally begin this column with scripture. Trust me, I haven't lost the distinction between Thoreau and Jesus, but this seems like such an important antidote to the "too much stuff" of our culture and the price our precious children are paying for that addiction. We have perverted Jesus' declaration, "I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) We have replaced that abundance, the fullness of life, now and forever, that Jesus promised with too many things, too many choices, life that moves too fast, and a world of physical and mental clutter. We have muffled our ears, so that we do not hear Jesus' declare that "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:20)

What is the "treasure" you want for your child? Childhood is a season of grace, filled with imagination, exploration, delight, and adventure. In our headlong rush to fill up our child's schedule, build their college resume, make sure they experience everything, and gain a competitive edge, we have lost the natural rhythm of the gentle unfolding of childhood. Intended to be an organic unfurling of the petals of a bud, until the glory of the bloom is present, we have prematurely peeled open the delicate petals, bruising them beyond recognition and repair, and ruined the flower that was to be.

A book I taught to parents in my church, *Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids* by Kim John Payne, stopped me in my tracks. His contention is that today's busier, faster society is waging an undeclared war on childhood. With too much stuff, too many choices, and too little time, children can become anxious, have trouble with friends and school, and even be diagnosed with behavioral problems, physical and mental health issues, and pay a price none of us ever intended.

Payne suggests some wonderful ways of simplifying life for our child, in order to recapture the gifts a childhood is intended to convey to children and adults alike. Take a look at the calendar. How much time is there for children to use the imagination; play with other children without jerseys, coaches, and referees; daydream and pretend; explore nature; get lost in their own thoughts; hang out with family? Let's protect blocks of time on the calendar for those vitally important parts of childhood. Let's limit the number of things in which our children are involved. Fewer endeavors result in deeper engagement, better focus, and sustained involvement. Children are more peaceful, centered, and attentive. They are happier.

And how about the "stuff" that is the earmark of an American childhood? Where did it all come from? Why do we hold onto it? Where do we store it? In many households,

toys and books have taken on a life of their own. The surfeit of possessions gets in the way of a child's ability to see what is there to play with, distracts the child from sustaining play, and overwhelms our children. Thoreau and Jesus concur - we must make sure that we select the things we value, lest our possessions own us!

Psalm 46:10 announces, "Be still and know that I am God." It is in being still, in quieting the roar of cultural demands and desires, that we experience the living God and cherish one another.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Schedule a p.j. day. Everyone gets to stay in pajamas. Just hang out. Play. Laugh. Be face-to-face. Be.
2. For a day, turn off all of the screens and don't answer the phone. The primary presence today is the people you love. Then, listen, just deeply listen to your child.
3. Ask a single question: What is it like being you right now?
4. Go to a park, lake, or other favorite place in nature. Pack a picnic. Stroll, don't power walk. Lie on your back and watch clouds. Look at growing things. Marvel. Savor.
5. Go through toys, clothes, and other possessions. Pack some away. Give some away. Throw out some that are not life-giving. Enjoy what you have left.