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The Idol of Appreciation

Many times, without even knowing it, we begin to look at our children as our trophies rather than God's creatures. We secretly want to display them on the mantels of our lives as visible testimonies to a job well done.

This week, with Mother's Day quickly approaching, I want to look at another common idol - the idol of appreciation. Let me first say that I don't have any problems with Mother's Day. I think we should be proactive in honoring our mothers and fathers, but because of sin, when good things become ruling things, they become bad things.

We've been there when the calls have come from school. We've been there in the wee hours of the morning when the nightmares have hit. We've changed the bed that had been wet once again. We've gone out in pajamas and slippers to the all-night drugstore for medicine. We've made the special skateboard-shaped birthday cakes. We've cleaned up vomit from the bedroom carpet. We've sat in on meetings with the principal. We've spent hours making the papier-mâché volcano.

We've sat through scores of painful recitals, spent thousands on memorable vacations. We've walked miles and miles in the aisles of supermarkets so mouths would be fed and stomachs filled. We've trudged hours through malls looking for "cool" clothes. We've washed enough clothes to fill the Grand Canyon! We've given up our dreams to pay for musical instruments and braces. Isn't it about time that we get some credit?

I can't tell you how many times I've heard parts of this list recited to me by parents, always with that same final punch line - "isn't it about time that we get some credit?" It seems so logical, so harmless, so right. Children *should* appreciate their parents. Yet, hear me now mothers and fathers - being appreciated cannot be our goal. When it becomes the thing we live for, we'll unwittingly look with hyper-vigilant eyes for appreciation in every situation.

Your children won't burst in the door at the end of the day and say, "Do you know what I was thinking about on the bus ride home today, Mom? I was thinking about how much you and Dad have done for me over the years. You've been with me and for me from the very first moment of my life until now. On the bus I was flooded with gratitude and I just couldn't wait to get home and say thank you!" (If this happens to you, erect stones as a lasting memorial or light an eternal flame!)

Very few fathers have headed to bed only to hear sobbing coming from their teenage daughter's bedroom and had this conversation:

"What's wrong, Dear?"

"Oh, I was just thinking about you and Mom and how unthankful I've been. I feel so guilty that I haven't appreciated you more, and I've committed myself to demonstrating that I appreciate you every day!"

On the contrary, the trend for teenagers is to be much more filled with self-orientation and self-interest than to be filled with an awareness and appreciation of others.

You see, if parents have forgotten their own vertical relationship with God as they've ministered to their children, if they think of it all as an "I serve, you appreciate" contract between the parent and child, they'll struggle with lots of discouragement and anger during parenting.

Parents, you need to ask yourself again - "Why am I doing what I'm doing? Who am I serving? What are the things that I've come to expect and demand? Whose desires rule the moments of opportunity with my child - God's or mine?"

--Paul Tripp