**Advocate- or Adversary?**

*To speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.* –Titus 3:2

 I think there are two things we can agree on as single parents: Co-parenting is a necessary and crucial aspect for any parents raising children, married or not. We can also agree that it is not always easy; in fact it may down right frustrating sometimes. No matter what the situation, we are always called to handle our side of the street in a God-honoring way; the rest we must entrust to Him. I also think that sometimes because of the pain and hurt that a divorce or broken relationship causes, we let our emotions get the best of us and overrule our better judgment. I have seen way too many times when one parent is withheld from another due to spite; or in an act of vengeance kids are used as pawns to get back at the other adult. In fact, the parents can act far more childish than the kids in situations like this, and guess who gets hurt the most? The children. If in fact you do find yourself in a co-parenting situation I am going to lay out two different options we can choose when it comes to the other parent: we can be an advocate for them…or an adversary.

**For the Moms:**

 Ladies, I am going to do my best to be as sensitive as possible here. I am also going off of the fact that the majority of you will be the primary caregiver, and some of you may not even have an option when it comes to Dad being in the picture. What I want to briefly cove is when I see far too many dads being alienated or restricted from their kids because mom isn’t letting him see them. He may in fact be a great dad and the bitterness is causing blindness. Let me give you a couple examples of how keeping your child’s father out of the picture only hurts your kids even more:

-Statistics show that children from fatherless homes experience much greater percentages of harmful and destructive behaviors. You may think that you can do a fine job all by yourself, and that may be true. But the fact is that if Dad is willing to be a part of his child’s life, no matter how hard you may try, there is still a much greater risk that your kids will fall into traps such as drinking and drugs, teen pregnancy, and other potentially harmful patterns if you try to do it alone.

-When dads are involved in a child’s life the children experience greater increases in self-perception, overall increase academically, and a greater sense of well-being. To deny a father in your child’s life is to take a huge part of their personality out also. When we can lay the sin of anger and bitterness aside, everyone benefits in the long run- especially our sons or daughters.

Instead moms, seek the Lord in prayer, through His Word, and godly counsel to help you fight through whatever is keeping you from being an advocate for your ex when it comes to him being a father. Is he really that bad of a father? Is that God’s opinion…or yours? Be careful that the latter does not hinder your role as a godly mother. Satan is especially crafty when it comes to times like this, and a little pain now can have generational implications. Stay focused and allow God to give you a renewed heart and spirit.

**For the Dads:**

 Look guys, based on the examples above, I am extremely aware of how much it can hurt to be kept at bay in your children’s lives. I’ve been there, and in a lot of ways, I still experience it to this day. We need to look beyond that. God has given us the charge of being our children’s spiritual leaders. No matter what goes on from the other side, that is still your kid’s mom and she deserves to see the love of Christ through you. If you don’t think so, then let’s take a look at our own lives. None of us even come close to measuring up to God’s standards; yet, through His never-ending mercy and grace, we are redeemed by our hope and faith in Jesus. Here’s another pitfall I see a lot fathers fall into- especially us noncustodial ones. It is when we forsake our role as leaders and we play the “good” or “fun” parent, thus eliminating any opportunities to be a godly father (Prov 13:24) and leaving mom hanging with the full weight of discipline. Perhaps we give our kids a lot of “stuff”, but never ourselves; or maybe we lavish them with gifts and toys instead of advocating with mom on how your son or daughter needs to study more and play less. What ends up happening in a scenario like that is she is left looking like the bad parent while you reap all the glory. Trust me, I’ve been there. I held so much resentment towards my daughter’s mom in the first few years that I became more consumed with fighting against her than raising my daughter responsibly. And remember, our kids are always watching us- so if we’re not careful, even the most subtle hints of spite can have long term consequences on them.

**For the Christ-Follower:**

Paul gives us specific instructions in the opening few verses of Ephesians 4: “…to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” God’s Word is explicitly clear when it comes to loving others and especially when it comes to parents raising their children. Emotions can be the devil’s playground if not guarded and it is only when a wound is left untreated that it can become infected. Single parenting is not perfect because it is born out of brokenness. Through our faith and obedience in Christ, we should look beyond the natural and stay zeroed in on our role as our children’s mother or father. Being an advocate for your ex doesn’t mean you need to be fond of them. What this demonstrates is that even in the most difficult of circumstances the light will always outshine the dark. Jesus has a huge heart for children (Matt 19:14), so why would we do anything to hinder one of the greatest blessings God has ever bestowed upon us?

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* –Rom 12:17-18 (NIV)

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