

# Your Child's Character – What's it Worth?

Several years ago, I ran across a book, *Little Threads*. It's a beautiful story that parallels the lives of 2 mothers raising their only children. One daughter is the "perfect" child and the daughter of the other mother is ... well, not so perfect.

Recently, I've been having some behavioral issues with one of my children that's been very challenging. At times, the not-so-perfect daughter in this book would come to mind as a similar behavior was being displayed in my own child. I felt like I had to address it over and over again.

Every.

Single.

Day.

I tried to think of new ways to explain from different angles why this behavior was wrong, how it could be avoided, why it should be avoided, etc... But still getting nowhere.

I thought maybe it could be a good time to whip out this precious book ... Surely this story would teach without having to be confrontational. The back-door approach ☐ So, I began reading. Much detail is given in the first few chapters about little Tangle Thread – the daughter whose behavior is extremely difficult from the moment she's born. As I'm reading, I'm thinking, "surely my child will see how horrible this little girl's behavior is, will draw the parallel and make the necessary changes."

I know ... I'm funny like that ☐

As I'm reading along, trying to "fix" my sweet child, I come to this passage in the book, speaking about the dear mother of

the willful child.

*She was so troubled with her child's conduct that when she tried to read, she often did not know what book she held in her hand. When she tried to draw or paint, her hand would tremble so that she had no pleasure in what she was doing. By degrees, the piano was opened less and less frequently, the portfolio of drawing began to be neglected and new books and magazines lie with uncut leaves upon the table. What she studied now was the character of her child, and how best to mold and fashion it into the likeness of Christ.*

Wherever she went or whatever she did, there was always a secret care gnawing at her heart.

"... there was always a secret care gnawing at her heart." As moms, we carry the burden of our children because nobody knows them like we do. We know when their character is in crisis and in need of intervention and the longer it goes unresolved, the longer we have the "gnawing at our hearts." We carry it with us everywhere ... secretly.

## **Am I willing to sacrifice?**

The mother in this story found little time for her own pleasures – piano playing, reading, drawing. She willingly laid these things aside so that she could intervene in the life of her daughter. It wasn't easy. It seemed a hopeless challenge and she felt totally helpless as her daughter's behavior was relentlessly bad.

Day after day. For years.

As I was trying to "fix" my daughter, I realized that maybe I needed a fix as well. This mother models what I'm not always willing to do – give up my own pleasures. When WW III is in full-swing in the game room again just as I'm about to finally have some "me" time, I have a choice. Deal with character issues of my kids at that moment or let it slide and fulfill

my own pleasure.

There are seasons of my life as a mom where I've not been as available to my friends. Maintaining my own social life has been put on the back burner at times in order to deal with issues at home. With a large family, sometimes this has been longer than I'd prefer, but necessary.

## **Becoming a student of my kids**

This mom sacrificed her own pleasures in order to invest the time into learning how best to train her daughter's character. She became a student of her daughter. I can't call myself a foreign language student if I only hop on DuoLingo occasionally while waiting for a Dr. appointment or ball practice. If I truly want to learn it, I must schedule the time and make it a priority or I'll never get beyond "Hola! Como estas?"

I must ask myself how important is my child's character? What's it worth to me? Am I willing to sacrifice my own pleasures for a time – maybe longer than I'd like – in order to determine the best way to deal with character issues of my children?

Character training goes deeper than dealing with the crisis of the moment. It's about being consistent and intentional ... anticipating the wrong behavior or attitudes in our kids and intervening before it becomes their new normal.

The time that we spend training our children is not "spent." It's invested. We're actually making an investment in their lives that will pay off ... and just like a monetary investment, it takes time ... but it's worth it.