

Anabaptist Parenting

Andrii Zvorygin yN-PH2196 mtH2a1*& GPT4

from Owen Sound,

attender of Glad Tidings Fellowship, Tara, ON

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1 Disclaimer

Herein, we delve into the Anabaptist tradition, shining a light on family-centered living with roots in scripture and the teachings of Jesus. Every Christian journey is unique, and while we turn to scriptures like 1 Thessalonians 5:21, which tells us to "Test everything; hold fast to what is good," we encourage you to do the same, finding what speaks to your heart.

2 Introduction

In the Anabaptist worldview, family is a sacred space of discipleship where spiritual formation and teachings of Jesus are deeply intertwined with daily living. As Proverbs 22:6 advises, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." The family serves as a microcosm of the broader community of believers, united in their quest to exemplify Jesus' love, humility, and service.

Choosing to live by the Anabaptist tradition means making intentional choices that may seem countercultural. Instead of yielding to the complexities and distractions of modern life, Anabaptist families prioritize simplicity. As Matthew 6:21 reminds us, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This simplicity goes beyond just eschewing materialism; it's about focusing on what holds eternal value—relationships with God, familial ties, and connections within the faith community.

The family-centered life in the Anabaptist tradition nurtures these invaluable relationships, providing a solid foundation of faith, love, and mutual support. As Ecclesiastes 4:12 states, "Though one may be

overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Through the unity of family and the extended Anabaptist community, individuals find spiritual enrichment, guidance, and a profound sense of purpose and belonging.

3 Biblical Foundations

3.1 Maternal Inheritance of Intelligence

Hannah and Samuel: Hannah's steadfast prayers and dedication resulted in Samuel, a significant prophet in Israel's history. Her faith, despite societal pressure and personal challenges, exemplifies the lasting influence of maternal guidance on a child's spiritual journey. Delve into 1 Samuel 1-2, where it's noted: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord."

Lois and Eunice: Timothy's grandmother and mother both played integral roles in Timothy's spiritual upbringing, cultivating a lineage of genuine faith. Their nurturing of Timothy accentuates the maternal role in fostering faith in successive generations. Paul commends this lineage in 2 Timothy 1:5, stating: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well."

3.2 Paternal Inheritance of Emotions

Abraham and Isaac: The deep bond between Abraham and Isaac becomes apparent in the narrative of their journey to Moriah. The story showcases mutual trust, understanding, and a shared faith, underscoring the potent emotional ties between father and son. In Genesis 22, Isaac's inquiry, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and Abraham's reassuring response, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son," capture this bond.

David and Solomon:

Solomon was David's successor, and David gave him wise counsel and blessings for his future reign. David advises Solomon, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in

*<https://anabaptist.ca> <https://x.com/aizvo>

his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies..." (1 Kings 2:2-3).

4 Role Delineation in Parenting

As we seek to build a faith-filled family environment rooted in Anabaptist principles, it's essential to understand the roles each family member plays. It is equally important to recognize that these roles are fluid and should be characterized by mutual support.

4.1 Mother's Role: The Educator

Importance of a Mother's Guidance in Early Education: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). A mother's early influence shapes a child's path, and her teachings stay with the child throughout life.

Homeschooling and the Anabaptist Values: "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Anabaptist values align with the intimate, hands-on nature of homeschooling, emphasizing faith and life application.

Curriculum Selection and Incorporating Faith-based Teachings: "All Writing is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Mothers have the opportunity to weave faith deeply into the academic fabric, ensuring a holistic education grounded in spiritual truths. Remembering that "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

Promotion of Life Skills and Independence: "She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31:27). Mothers ensure their children are equipped with essential life skills, from basic chores to managing responsibilities, cultivating a sense of independence and capability.

Cultivating a Loving and Safe Environment: "As a mother comforts her child,

so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). Mothers create an atmosphere of love, security, and acceptance, wherein children feel valued and protected.

4.2 Father's Role: Emotional Guardian

The Father as the Emotional Anchor of the Family: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). As pillars of the household, fathers play a crucial role in creating a stable, nurturing environment.

Psalm 103:13: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him." This scripture emphasizes the compassionate role of a father, reflecting God's own compassion for His children.

Guiding Children Through Emotional Growth and Understanding: "The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him" (Proverbs 20:7). Through their actions and guidance, fathers have a unique role in helping children navigate their emotions and challenges.

Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." This verse underscores the emotional impact fathers can have on their children, emphasizing the need to foster a positive emotional environment.

Proverbs 29:17: "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart." This Proverb conveys the idea that consistent and loving discipline leads to a well-adjusted child.

Proverbs 13:24: "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." This doesn't advocate for physical punishment but rather suggests that loving discipline is necessary for a child's well-being. The "rod" in Hebrew "shebet" denotes a shepherd's tool used to protect the sheep from predators and sometimes to correct the path of a sheep that was straying. When a sheep would stray, the shepherd would use the rod to steer it back to safety. The rod, in this case, is symbolic of guidance and protection, not punishment. David's famous Psalm 23 says, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." So the rod represents protection, guidance, correction, and instruction, setting healthy limits.

Children may need help in learning to respect and obeying their parents and elders. This respect extends to other authority figures and members of the community.

Addressing and Managing Family

Conflicts: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Fathers, by embodying wisdom and understanding, can lead the family through times of conflict, ensuring unity and mutual respect.

Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." This verse highlights the Infinite Father's proximity and care for those who are emotionally wounded. And so a corporeal father is expected to care for his family members when they are crushed in spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." Here, God is referred to as the "Father of compassion" and the "God of all comfort." Indicating the corporeal father's role in being a source of compassion and comfort.

Psalm 68:5: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." This speaks of God's role in providing emotional and protective support. This indicates a father's role in helping others doesn't end with the biological family, but extends to all those who seek their paternal guidance, particularly in their home.

4.3 Role of Children in the Anabaptist Family

The Anabaptist tradition, grounded deeply in biblical teachings, recognizes the vital role children play in family and community life. While every child is unique and contributes to the family in individual ways, there are foundational responsibilities and roles children are encouraged to embrace based on scriptural guidance.

Obedience and Respect: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' — which is the first commandment with a promise — 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'" (Ephesians 6:1-3) In Anabaptist families, children are taught the importance

of respecting and obeying their parents and elders. This respect extends to other authority figures and members of the community.

Participation in Family Life: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Children actively participate in family activities, chores, and rituals, learning the value of work, fellowship, and service from an early age.

Personal Growth and Spirituality: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14) Encouraging personal spiritual growth and self-awareness, Anabaptist families guide children in Bible study, prayer, and reflection, cultivating a personal relationship with God.

Service and Community Involvement: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10) Children are encouraged to get involved in community activities, assist neighbors, and contribute to community welfare, reflecting the Anabaptist emphasis on service and mutual aid.

Learning and Wisdom Seeking: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." (Proverbs 1:8) Children are encouraged to be inquisitive, seek knowledge, and apply wisdom in their daily lives. This aligns with the Anabaptist value of continuous growth and understanding of God's word.

5 Co-Parenting in Harmony

Mutual Respect and Support Between

Spouses: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." - Ephesians 5:21 At the core of effective co-parenting is the mutual respect and support between spouses. The Apostle Paul encourages mutual submission, a principle that calls for recognizing the strengths and roles of each partner. When both parents approach parenting with respect for each other's perspectives and methods, it lays the groundwork for a harmonious household.

Balancing Spiritual, Emotional, and Educational Guidance: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as

you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..." - Colossians 3:16 As parents, it's essential to provide a holistic upbringing for children that encompasses spiritual, emotional, and educational guidance. By grounding these teachings in the teachings of Christ, children receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for both the challenges of the world and their spiritual journey.

Deuteronomy 4:9: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." This underscores the role of all parents in passing down wisdom and love to the next generation.

Unity in Parenting Decisions: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." - 1 Corinthians 1:10 It's vital for co-parents to present a united front. Disagreements are natural, but they should be addressed privately, ensuring that children see their parents working together. Unity in parenting decisions not only provides stability for children but also models the collaborative spirit they can carry into their own relationships and communities.

6 Anabaptist Community Support

6.1 Role of the Larger Anabaptist Community in Family Upbringing

In the Anabaptist tradition, community is not just a group of people living in proximity but is deeply rooted in shared faith, values, and mutual support. "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Families do not raise their children in isolation but are enveloped by the care, teachings, and traditions of the larger community. This collective involvement ensures that the child grows with a robust sense of identity, grounded in Anabaptist beliefs.

6.2 Seeking Wisdom and Counsel from Elders

The Anabaptist community highly respects its elders, seeing them as reservoirs of wisdom, experience, and faith. "Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22). Families often turn to them for guidance, especially in matters of faith, ethics, and life choices. The elders, having lived through the challenges and joys of life while adhering to their faith, provide invaluable counsel and perspective.

6.3 Fellowship and Community Events to Enrich Family Life

Fellowship is a cornerstone of Anabaptist life. Through community events, shared meals, joint worship, and other communal activities, families bond, share their lives, and grow together in faith. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). These gatherings, whether they are celebrations or solemn occasions, play a crucial role in keeping the community knit together and reinforcing shared values. They serve as moments for both spiritual edification and joyful togetherness, ensuring that the faith is not just individually practiced but communally lived.

6.4 Conclusion

The Anabaptist vision of family paints a vibrant portrait of unity, love, and commitment deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus. Drawing from biblical foundations, this vision embraces the sacred roles of parents as both educators and emotional guardians, while recognizing the essential contributions of children. Beyond the familial unit, the surrounding Anabaptist community plays a pivotal role in nurturing, guiding, and supporting each family, reinforcing the profound belief in community, humility, and service.

As we journey through the challenges and joys of parenting, leaning on the wisdom of the past and the fellowship of the present becomes invaluable. We warmly invite you to connect with local Anabaptist families, to share experiences, stories, and insights. Together, we can continue to foster a nurturing environment where faith, love, and understanding flourish, honoring the vision and values we cherish deeply.