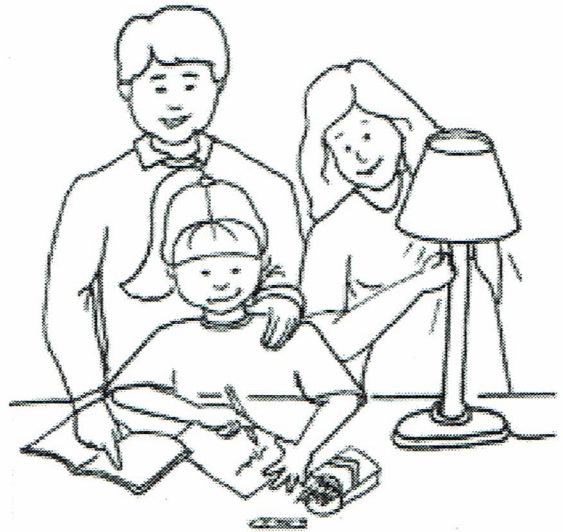


Parent and Child

From "Last Thing At Night" by Hugh Lavery

You may have heard of the little child who was kneeling at its prayers and at the end added a prayer of its own. It was this - O God, make the bad people good and the good people nice.

It is a very revealing prayer. The child knows who are the supposedly good people. But it finds them unattractive. Now why should 'officially' good people, church-goers perhaps, be unattractive, even unpleasant? Christ said there was only one acid test of real goodness, the end-product. By their fruits you shall know them.



There is no other test than this - the end-product, kindness, tolerance, a controlled tongue, evenness of temper.

Bad temper is the virus that poisons many a home. A priest in his visiting sees many a family living lives of quiet desperation because of one bad tempered parent. I say parent, because tonight I am thinking of the children, most of them in bed now, some of them possibly anxious and fretful because of a blaze of temper, a row, or a domestic uproar one can only describe as fearful.

Fear is the source of bad temper, some turmoil deep in the heart of father or mother. The child can sense this. And the child differs from us in being helpless, insecure. It seeks that security from father and mother. They stand for stability, for confidence for those strong qualities we call 'adult'. They insure the child against fear. They are the child's foundation, its footing.

A display of bad temper suddenly shatters this firm footing. The child realises that father — or mother — is afraid, is insecure. And this great big world is a fearful place. It is no longer a cosy, snug world, not a place of love and kindness any more. The beginnings of fear are already in the child. And fear drives out love. There is never any peaceful co-existence of the two. Fear will always drive out love. Fear also drives out God.

I wonder how you imagine God. As kind or as frightening? The answer is simple. You imagine God in the same way as you saw your parents as a child. The child takes its picture of God from father and mother. If they are loving then God is love. If they are uneven, unpredictable, bad tempered, then God is likewise, a figure of fear, unapproachable and, in consequence, unapproached.

Parents carry a great responsibility - the life-long happiness of their children is theirs. Their goodness, their godliness, their life is in your hands. Good temper builds. Bad temper destroys.

The parent is the image of God for every child.

Can we alter the child's prayer just a little and say - O God make the bad people good, and the good people good-tempered. For that's what the frightened child means by 'nice'. just that. But it means such a lot.

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*Youth is not a time of life - it is a state of mind,
it is a temper of the will,
a quality of the imagination,
a vigor of the emotions,
a predominance of courage over timidity,
of the appetite for adventure over love of ease.*

*Nobody grows old by merely living a number of
years.
People grow old only by deserting their ideals.*

*Years wrinkle the skin,
but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul.*

*So long as your heart receives messages
of beauty, cheer, courage, grandeur
and power from the earth,
from man and from the Infinite,
so long you are young.*

Samuel Ullman