

Vows and Parenting

From
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“When I grow up, no one is going to tell me what to do.”

“When I have children, I am going to all of their sporting events.”

“Whenever we go to an amusement park, I will buy my child a souvenir.”

“When I have children, they’re each going to get the chance to go to college.”

Whether or not we were aware of it, many of us have made unspoken vows that were usually based on how we were raised. In his book *Pain and Pretending*, Rich Buhler describes four general categories of vows: vows of silence, revenge, perfection and safety.¹

Vows of Silence—Some adults decide to never acknowledge painful things that happened to them as children. Vows of silence can lay dormant for many years before being triggered by similar experiences of our own children.

Vows of Revenge—These commonly occur when adults carry unresolved anger into their roles as parents. The anger may inadvertently be transferred to their children or spouse and can disrupt a household if it is not addressed.

Vows of Perfection—Adults who experienced rejection as a child may subconsciously think, *I will be the*

perfect spouse and perfect parent and then nothing bad will happen to my family. However, vows of perfection often result in a stressful life, and that stress can be passed on to their children.

Vows of Safety—When an adult is overprotective, the whole family typically suffers. Vows of safety can be the most far-reaching vows because they set into motion the potentially lifelong need to control others and avoid pain.

At first glance, the vows listed above don’t seem too severe; but each one (when taken to the extreme) can cause problems in parenting. My wife and I both made the vow to attend all of our kids’ sporting events because we felt that our parents never

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attended our outside activities. The reality of the situation, however, was that it became very stressful trying to attend all of our children’s events, and we felt guilty when we missed one. Realizing that

we had made this vow in error was the first step toward making a change in our behavior and feelings. For some reason, I also made a vow never to buy my children cheap presents. I am deeply indebted to my wife for helping me realize the folly of that vow before getting too deeply in debt!

Take time to identify unspoken parenting vows you may have made, and ask God’s wisdom in evaluating them.

A Challenge to You

1. Discuss with your spouse or a friend whether or not you made any vows as a child or teenager. Try to determine if any of your behaviors as a parent are the result of these vows.
2. Determine to what degree your vows may be healthy and if there is any way in which they might be harmful. If a vow is causing unhealthy behavior, ask for God’s help and wisdom in planning a way to change the behavior.

Note

1. Rich Buhler, *Pain and Pretending* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, February 1991), pp. 94-97.

