

I recently commented on a post on Facebook. A “friend” posted a cartoon of a screaming kid, and it said, “We talk so much about leaving a better world to our kids, that we forget about leaving better kids to our world. Educate your children; say no to them every once in a while.” The likes and comments that followed suggested that many people agreed. However, I was, I feel rightly, somewhat insulted by this. It made me feel like I am a member of a group that was being negatively stereotyped.

At an earlier stage in my life I might have chuckled and hardly thought about this post. Not now. I am fairly content with my inclusion in the targeted group. However, I didn’t plan to be a part of it, and I am often surprised to find myself here. When I was in college, I had a vision of what my future would be. It involved adventure and challenge and risk. I got all of those in spades, just not in the form I imagined.

Our oldest son Sam was born 9 years after my wife, Brenna, and I met. To me, that seems like a long time, but I had had a long way to go. I met Brenna when I was 26 years old and unemployed with a high school diploma. From this vantage, I could not see a family. I had no place or way to care for them. Due to this situation, I think I created a vision of the future in which they did not exist. I also created the belief that I did not want them. But it was only an internal creation. I did want them; I just didn’t know it yet.

So what happened in that 9 years? Well just about everything. I fell in love, finished college, and got a job and a home. I even got a cat. Everything was in place and, with the excuses gone, it was time. We read the books, talked about it until we were nauseous, and then finally took the plunge, and then Sam was born in December of 2000. This is when my perspective shift went into hyperdrive.

There is no preparation for having a baby, none. I had never had to take care of anyone in my life. All of the talents that I thought I brought to the endeavor were either not required or insufficient. My stoic detachment... Junk. My ability to reason... Worthless. The scientific method... Laughable. Thrown into the deep water, I had to change quickly or else, and I have been on a path of change ever since.

I quickly realized that I had to give some things up. I thought that I could do a lot of things by myself. Childrearing was not one of them. Things quickly became so big and so complex that a network needed to be developed to handle the various tasks. This network included Bren and I obviously, but we also added grandparents, friends, and neighbors. About this time I realized that my self-reliant personal belief was no longer at the top of my goal list. I enjoyed sharing, collaborating, and entrusting others. This realization didn't happen in a flash of light or a vision from a dream. It was slow progression. But it was clear and dramatic.

Soon after Sam was born, we joined a church, and it was a relief to be with people who were sharing similar experiences. I also enjoyed the inspiration and the time that I was given to contemplate how I felt about my relationship with the world. There was a point one Sunday morning when we were struggling to get ready for church, and Bren suggested we just skip it. I told her that I wanted to go, and she rallied and we got out the door on time. We were both surprised that I was the one encouraging participation. Up to this point, she was always the one who chose to join in and I followed along or didn't.

There have also been social implications to this perspective shift. I have been on a journey that has made me more aware of caring for others, and especially as that relates to the tension between the haves and have nots. In the past I have been moved by arguments about financial responsibility and weighed those more heavily than addressing suffering or feeling compassion. I remember a conversation with a friend about whether caring for those in need is feasible. My friend pointed out to me that our government has plenty of money, it is only a matter of who we choose to allocate those funds to. I felt this was naïve, but I have since changed this opinion and tend to agree with my friend. This shift is directly related to my being a parent. To see the needs of children who obviously can't provide for themselves, it is a short jump to caring for all who need help.

Most recently, my journey has involved me in church and civic groups. It is not my instinct to join in, but when I do I prefer to at least appear to be lifting the heavy end. Actually I get a great deal of satisfaction from my efforts in Youth Ministry, and in my town Government positions. Even though I am rewarded greatly for this work, I choose to do it because I would like to be someone who

adds and not subtracts from the collective good. I also want to be someone that my kids can admire and who they would aspire to emulate.

I am sure that this perspective shift is not over. I am aware that the teen years have not yet begun. Even with that awareness, I am much better positioned than in the past to handle the tribulations ahead. When the challenges come, I will be more likely to consider them with compassion. When problems arise I will be more willing to look for the wisdom of others to guide me. When it comes time to choose between two competing ideas, I will be more likely to consider the effects on those who are least able to help themselves.

Now, I can't do justice to this perspective shift, this profound journey in a snarky Facebook post. Nor do I think my friend can't acquire greater compassion and understanding unless he becomes a father. I do know that the journey, for me, has become the goal. And I know that if I meet this journey with an open heart and mind, and a readiness to learn, I may just have a chance to leave a better world to my children, and better fathers to their children, too.