

November 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

For the past 12 years, I have written monthly for a Chinese magazine in New Jersey. The secular magazine was the only Chinese magazine in New Jersey and it had a widespread circulation among the Chinese community. I wrote articles about bits and pieces of life and took opportunity to insert within Biblical concepts. Not long ago, I wrote on the theme of the ups and downs of raising children in the United States which generated a lot of response. Most Chinese families in North America have few children and like parents all over the world, they love their children deeply. However; some parents, due to their over-protection, actually harmed their children; ie, while children lived at home, the parents made all the decisions for them and the children grew up like roses cultivated in a greenhouse, very fragile and weak. This method of raising children caused the children not to develop self reliance; and once away from the nest off to the university, they suddenly found themselves incapable of doing anything by or for themselves. There is another problem and that is a child's obedience to parents has become a thing in the past. Modern children have been raised to be independent, to challenge authority, especially during the rebellious period of teenage years, every family seemed to have a difficult story to tell. One parent, after reading the article approached me later, holding the article and with downtrodden face, sighed then said: "Yeah, you said it right, being a parent living in North America is pretty difficult!"

Difficult being parents, how well I know! I will never forget that one day when my daughter came home from Boston University. As soon as she entered the house, she complained loudly to us parents, questioned us why we did not persist and force her to study Chinese. After three years of college, she understood then Chinese population accounted for a quarter of the world's population and the rapid development of business opportunities seemed limitless. In addition to English, if she also knew Chinese, a bright future and many opportunities would await at her door. On the same token, as a descendant of such rich and ancient culture, it was a disgrace to not even know one's name in Chinese, right? "Mom and Dad, why did you not insist on me learning Chinese before?" As my wife and I listened, we were so angry we could only roll our eyes for we were stunned and speechless. Only God knew how we survived those years when our daughter studied Chinese. It was precisely because we believed that being a Chinese, we should not forget our roots, and because we understood that with China's large population, there will be unlimited opportunities for business development, we made every effort to force our daughter to attend Chinese language school offered by church. Who knew from the very first class, our family would be in turmoil hence. Our daughter kept complaining about Chinese being hard to write, not being able to understand the teacher speaking in Mandarin, and even more painful to have to memorize/recite in Chinese. Every week she protested, and from time to time, with tears she would argue with us parents that other fellow students did not have to study Chinese, why she alone must suffer through the pain of taking Chinese lessons. My wife and I tried to use a variety of methods, to motivate her or to reason with her, all in the hope of keeping her in Chinese class. For four long years, every Saturday was a terribly painful experience, we tried many ways to encourage, to stay by her side when she did her homework, helped her memorize, after a test we would buy a gift, let her pick her favorite restaurant ... and the result? Enraged father, angry mother, and resentful daughter. Sunday became the most difficult day of the week, from early morning, daggers poised to attack. The drive to church was always filled with endless arguments, no peace, hearts filled with anguish instead of inner tranquility, and per my memory never had a happy ending.

Then one day, my daughter came back from Chinese language school crying, tearfully pleading with us to let her stop Chinese class. She was willing to give up her allowance, even willing to wash the dishes after every meal, stop watching TV, practice piano every day, dutifully do her homework, etc. if we will permit her to cease Chinese lessons. Finally, as parents, our hearts softened, or perhaps we got tired of the disputes and longed for

peace, we reluctantly granted our daughter's request. Since then, she abandoned Chinese, and soon after she couldn't even write her name in Chinese. How could, just a few years later, home from college, she actually dared to complain that we did not insist on her studying Chinese? I asked her whether she had any conscience? Has she forgotten all the arguments we used to have when she studied Chinese language in the past? In like manner with eyes blazing, my daughter asserted: "Dad, I remember, of course! I certainly knew that it was I who refused to study Chinese, and insisted on giving up. Only I was young then, immature; you are the parents, of course, you knew what would be important to me, for my future, you should have persevered to the end, not become soft-hearted. Don't you know? When I was young, though I complained and argued, I would grow up to be grateful to you for life." Upon hearing this, my wife and I were dumbfounded and we just looked at each other without saying a word.

Very hard being modern parents, if we give in to our children, they may grow up and complain but if we take a stand and don't compromise, we find ourselves living with constant struggles. Looking back, our daughter was right, my wife and I really should have endured to the end, to remain steadfast and perhaps there may have been a turn for the better. In this generation of moral decay, parental responsibility is a daunting task. Studying Chinese may not be the only important thing parents should insist on?

A few years ago, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother", a book once took the West by the storm, became a topic of intense debate in American society: Is the Chinese iron fisted way of teaching children really superior than that of the Western way? "Tiger Mom" of the book, a law professor at Yale Law School, shared her "Chinese parenting method" on her two daughters as examples to prove that this approach is effective. Tiger Mom wielded iron fist discipline, forcing two daughters to become accomplished, severely restricted their extra-curricular activities, accepted only perfect scores, and as for her daughters' violin practice, no stopping 'til she is satisfied. If all these are true, this traditional teaching method is totally and fundamentally contrary to Western-style educational method. Yet modern China in many areas of development whether it be academic, scientific, economic, military, etc. is closing in on the Western powers and may even be showing the tendency of going beyond. The shockwaves created by this book were felt deep and wide and caused many American families to ask ourselves: Are we really the losers referred to by the Tiger Mom? In the past we prided ourselves on the superiority of American educational system, are we really creating a generation of decadent children, destined to be eliminated in this survival of the fittest generation? Will the children reared by "Tiger Mom" of Chinese education eventually rule the world, and the children reared under the Western "permissive" style find it difficult to adapt in this highly competitive generation? In addition, Christian parents must ask ourselves, in what ways are we teaching children to walk in God's path? What are the criteria we use to measure our children's progress? How can we help our children to hold unto Bible truths? How can we pass down the Christian faith as the foundation of life? If we as parents don't have a foundation, what kind of hope will our children have in the future? Nothing escapes the eyes of our children, they will do what they see their parents do. The actions of the parents at home, their character, values, priorities, etc. Actions speak louder than words. What we say and do are continually shaping the future of our children. "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him." Our children belong to the Lord, how should we rear this inheritance from the Lord? Proverbs say, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.. [Proverbs 22:6]. It is my prayer and hope that in the future we as parents will not hear our children complain: "Mom and Dad, I was naïve when I was little, and since you had better understanding that these things will have a great impact on my future, why did you not insist on it?"

A Member of Your family in Christ,

Rev. Calvin Tran