

When You Find Out You are a New Parent

by Lee Wilson

When my wife announced she was pregnant with our first child, I felt an unbelievable amount of pressure, fear and responsibility I felt that way, not because of what I knew, but because of what I didn't know. I didn't know what to expect so I made some incorrect assumptions.

I thought my life was over. I thought my fun was over. I felt like I had left a world of freedom and entered a world of entrapment.

I didn't tell anyone how I felt because I didn't want to appear immature or selfish. I wish someone knew how I felt then so they could have given me a reality check. That's what I want to give you if you've recently learned you are expecting a child. I want to tell you what being a parent really means.

It does mean:

A New Life. You will be bringing a life into the world that would have never existed were it not for you. He'll have your eyes. She'll have your hair color. This life will be a mini-version of you in many ways and you'll want to nurture and protect him any way you can. You'll want him to have the opportunities you didn't and the knowledge you gained from your life.

In many ways, it will seem this life is a second chance for you and because of that, you'll walk a fine line between letting him make his own choices when appropriate and deciding for him when necessary.

Responsibility. Your level of responsibility will be higher than it has ever been. You'll be responsible for leadership, financial support, spiritual guidance, and loving discipline. Not only will this child expect it from you, but the world will also expect you to provide it.

Opportunity. You will have an opportunity to mold and shape a life that could change the world for good. This responsibility is both exciting and overwhelming. Though you can't take full credit for her accomplishments, you were a major contributor. If she does great things, she will reflect positively on you. If she does bad things, she will reflect negatively on you.

In both possibilities, remember that she makes her own choices. You can only do so much. Pray often and do your best. Love is not a cure-all, but helps everything.

It does *not* mean:

The End. It does not mean an end to fun or free time. If you're blessed with caring parents who live nearby, they might be able to take care of your child while you and your spouse have some time alone. To avoid the cost of babysitters, befriend another couple with a child close to the age of yours and choose one night each week to alternate "date nights." You'll watch their child one Friday night in exchange for them taking care of your child the next Friday night. This way you can have an evening alone with your spouse.

Don't forget, there's plenty of fun to be had with your spouse and your child—it's not all diapers and feedings. Much of it is laughter, smiles and, as they say, "precious moments."

Idealism. Everything will not go according to plan. You'll find that parenting books and advice from others doesn't always prove to be beneficial or even realistic. Each child, parent and situation is different. Parenting is not an exact science. Establish some guidelines to give you direction, but don't panic if you deviate some from the original plan.

Perfection. Know that you will not do everything perfectly. At times, you will be impatient, overbearing, unreasonable and illogical. Apologize to your child and/or spouse when this happens. Just because you're a parent doesn't mean your decisions are always correct. Be demanding of yourself but forgiving at the same time.

It's All Up To You

No matter what, you make the calls. Don't be afraid to ask for advice but don't be afraid to ignore it either. You're the parent, the buck stops with you.

Don't measure success by whether or not your child is happy with your decisions. Your child's feelings on your decisions do not determine your worth as a parent. Throughout history, parents have been familiar with the sound of stomping feet and yells of defiance. Your child's reaction does not make your decision wrong any more than it makes it right.

Jesus refers to God as, "*the good Father*" (Luke 11:12-14), yet His children have stomped their feet, complained, cried, rebelled, cursed, and said, "That's not fair!" But He is *still* the good Father.

In the end, you have to do what you think is right and best for the life you brought into the world. Don't let any other person make those decisions for you.

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