

## **Bible and the Headlines: Parenting Styles**

David Bachelor, PhD

February 4, 2025

The recent flooding in Australia has brought attention to the Land Down Under and brought “antipodes” back into news parlance. However, there is another antipodes making headlines and these opposites have nothing to do with geography. These contrasting stories are about parenting styles. On one side is the “snowplow parent.” The other extreme is the “FAFO parent.”

On January 31, the caregiver website Care.Com featured, “The Snowplow Parenting Trap — And How to Avoid It.” Using the analogy of municipal workers’ pre-dawn road clearance, the article defined the potential trap, “Snowplow parenting is all about removing obstacles to create a smooth path to success for kids, whether those obstacles are social, emotional or academic.” The pitfalls of raising a child in this manner is that it exhausts the parents, and a child raised behind the snowplow never develops problem solving skills.

At the “equator” of parenting-styles is an informed parent. This trend was covered in a February 2<sup>nd</sup> op-ed piece in the LA Times, “Opinion: A New Generation Has Its Own Dr. Spock — And a Very Different Take on Parenting.” The writer lists the parenting experts (which she calls ‘parent whisperers’) from 1946 to 2025. While Dr. Spock and many other authorities were pediatricians, the current parent whisperer, Emily Oster, is an economist. Instead of a snowplow, Oster recommends data, “Armed with the best and most relevant information from high-quality studies . . . moms and dads can make their own decisions.” The same information used by parents for their choices also helps parents defend their decisions against the inevitable critics.

The inspirational website Upworthy posted on February 1<sup>st</sup>, “Parents Are Split on the 'FAFO' Parenting Style that Emphasizes Natural Consequences.” The acronym “FAFO” stands for “Fool Around and Find Out” (‘Fool’ is a replacement for a stronger F-word). This parenting style, “. . . emphasizes that kids should learn by experiencing the natural consequences of their actions, instead of punishments imposed by parents.” As an example of “fool around,” the perennial battle to get a child to don a jacket when it’s cold is given. If said child leaves the house minus the jacket, a FAFO parent does not do what the snowplow parent does and bring the child’s jacket “just in case.” The FAFO parent believes a little hypothermia is a much better pedagogue.

Long before there was Dr. Spock, there was the Bible. It shows God using all three types of parenting styles with His children. God was a snowplow parent to the Israelites after their Egyptian captivity. He promised them, “Large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD” (Deut 6:10-12). God used the informed parent style as He spoke through Moses before the Israelites entered the Promise Land, “This day I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deut 30:19). God was a FAFO parent in the Book of Judges. When foreign nations invaded the land because His children had stopped worshipping Him, God told the Israelites “You have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble” (Jdg 10:13-14 ).

In Hebrews, the purpose behind God’s parenting style is explained, “Our earthly parents trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they knew how, but

God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness" (Heb 12:10). No wonder we say when we pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matt 6:9).