

Parenting against the tide

**—a handbook for twenty-first century
Christian parents**

Ann Benton



EP Books (Evangelical Press), Registered Office: 140
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EP BOOKS are distributed in the USA by:
JPL Books, 3883 Linden Ave. S.E.,
Wyoming, MI 49548
order@jplbooks.com
www.jplbooks.com

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Reprinted 2019

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN: 978-1-78397-035-3

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This book is dedicated with love to

Matt and Chrisi

Tom and Rebecca

Jess and Pete

Owen and Missy

who already know what it is to swim against the tide.

Keep going.

There are many books on parenting by self-appointed experts who give us a bucketful of sugar to help the medicine go down. Ann Benton's parenting book is different. It is full of not just home truths but biblical truths. It is a handbook in the mode of a manual helping parents to work through what it means to be biblical parents and what to watch out for along the way.

Ann does not pull her punches. She puts the spotlight on an age which seeks pleasure first; on parenting which dances to the tune of the recent hit song 'Happy' with the catchy lyrics 'clap along if you think happiness is the truth'.

Ann is deliberately and faithfully going against the tide of a worldview about parenting. Some will find it uncomfortable and hard hitting but most will recognise the loving desire to reveal God's truth about parenting.

The book is designed to be helpful and it ends each chapter with 'practical inferences and applications' and further reading. It is a serious book to be read and worked through, which will probably not leave you entertained but will leave you challenged and encouraged. Ann reminds us that the Bible has all the answers and the model for parenting. She describes the Bible worldview of a child worthy of the utmost respect—not a product of chance but made in the image of God; a child born into a system of care built around the Commandment to 'Honour your father and mother so that you may live long in the land'.

The central message of Ann's book and indeed the Bible to parents is that it is in the best interests of a child to be under his parents' authority, obedient to them. The book does not take parents on a guilt trip, nor does it smother them with false comfort. Amidst a plethora of advice and tips from 'experts', the great and often not so good, biblical parenting gives in Ann's words 'simplicity, liberty and joy to raising children'. It provides parents who believe the Bible with the confidence to be parents as God intended and as he modelled.

By writing this book and, somewhat reluctantly publishing it, Ann has done a service for us all by putting firmly down on paper the standard of God's infallible word against the secularist tide which washes into our family life. It

is a gritty, real, honest and above all truthful book which points us to the best parent of all—Our Father God.

David Burrowes MP

Ann Benton's *Parenting Against the Tide* is simply superb. Here is a book that equips Christian parents to be careful, wise, and God-honoring in doing what is best both for their children and for their homes, more broadly. This book is based on Biblical principles and it provides also clear application of these principles. It contains much common (actually, not so common) sense which parents will find so very helpful. The book demonstrates clearly how to raise a family based on the foundation of the true, inspired, and inerrant Word of God. Additionally, it gives clear guidance on maintaining the primacy of the marriage relationship, which is so refreshing in this day of child-centered parenting. This well-written, inspiring, practical, and winsome book will help parents sort through the muddled confusion they face. We highly recommend this parenting book, one of the best we have read.

Bruce and Jodi Ware

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, USA

This book brilliantly punctures many of the current orthodoxies surrounding children and parenting. Ann Benton shows that as we set out to please God in fulfilling our role as parents, that is the surest road to joy in family life. Each chapter is full of biblical wisdom and common sense.

Dr Sharon James, author and conference speaker.

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Introduction

Another book on parenting?

Some things are much harder than they used to be

On a Friday morning during the wettest January on record, I stood outside the gates of our local primary school, where for over twenty-five years I have been visiting weekly to take the whole school for a time of singing and to rehearse the choir. Torrential rain was soaking my hair and my coat. Water was running down my neck as I fumbled amongst all the music in my bag for a post-it note on which is written the four-digit security code which will open the electronic

gate. I realise I should have known it by heart but on this occasion memory failed me: they keep changing the code on account of the ingenuity of eight-year olds. As my sodden fingers punched in the code I reflected on the indisputable fact that some things are much harder than they used to be.

Before a certain Wednesday in March 1996, people who volunteered to help in schools had no such difficulties in gaining entry. But Thomas Hamilton changed that when on March 13th 1996 he entered a primary school in Dunblane, Scotland and shot sixteen children and a teacher. This is his legacy. Maybe security codes on school gates have saved children's lives. I rather doubt it. What I do know is that they have made people's lives harder.

Some things don't change.

I know the Dunblane massacre happened on a Wednesday in March because, as with the assassination of JFK and other shocking atrocities of my lifetime, I recall exactly where I was when I heard about it. Somewhat poignantly, I was at an event which annually celebrates primary school children in the town where I live. The Schools' Music Festival assembles from all the primary schools in the area a representation of young musical talent. As trainer of the school choir I turn up every year with my 16 best singers who have been drilled in a selection of songs and who join a massed children's choir under a guest conductor's baton and sing their little heads off before a paying audience.

An additional item on the programme on this occasion is the combined orchestra. Keep in mind that these are ordinary children aged eleven and less. Some of them have only been

learning their instruments for a matter of months. The look of frowning concentration on each of their faces as they scrape, pluck, bang or blow is magnificent. The sound is something else. Their rendition, one year, of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus caused me to stuff my handkerchief in my mouth in an effort to stifle a barely containable hoot of laughter. Here was a noise to make any listener question civilisation. And yet, as I glanced sidelong along my row, no one else was laughing. People were leaning forward with eager-eyed encouraging nods and smiles. Fingers twitched as occasionally a snatch of familiar rhythm or melody was identified. To be honest, there wasn't much to go on. At the last extraordinary chord, the auditorium erupted in thunderous applause and this was not, so I believe, with relief that the assault on the ear was over. This was genuine, unfettered delight and appreciation. I admired it most sincerely. I am all for encouraging effort. But the response was singularly that of an audience comprised almost totally of parents. Parental love is a wonderful thing. Generally it doesn't change. But it can also make a person blind, or in this case, deaf.

Why am I writing another book on parenting?

For the two reasons exemplified in the above two stories.

Firstly, the world has changed. Just like getting into a primary school, parenting is harder than it used to be. The reasons behind some of the changes are generally well-intentioned with the safety and protection of children in mind. But, as I hope this book will demonstrate and as many parents acknowledge, the changes have made raising children harder work.

Secondly, the extraordinary and endearing love of parents for

their children can make them blind to certain truths. They see their children; they love their children. But they don't always see what is going on.

Dr Aric Sigman in his book *'The Spoilt Generation'* spells out the problem and backs his thesis up with a considerable body of research. He talks about a 'landscape of spoiling' due to a retreat of parents from authority, sometimes under a banner of 'putting children first' or 'listening to children'. Because of this, boundaries have been removed and children are being robbed of a basic support system. His book is a plea to restore authority and counteract the growing sense of entitlement of the rising generation, which is not making them happier. It is not making their parents happier either.

I am not intending to write off a generation or to suggest that every child in Britain is a brat. But I hope to address the issues relating to a 'spoilt generation' in this book. I am writing particularly for Christians, although I know that some of the topics will be of concern to non-Christians as well. I regularly speak to a range of parents who are all too aware of the problem. I truly believe that God's ways are best for all people whatever their background and culture. Dr Sigman, not a believer, proves this by unwittingly making the case for a kind of parenting which has much in common with a Biblical worldview. Truth is truth wherever you find it and by God's common grace, unbelievers frequently make wise observations and suggestions.

Christian believers need to recognise, however, that the majority of modern parenting advice, however nice and cosy it sounds, is rooted in a worldview that is quite foreign to the

Bible and this very much affects the kind of advice that is given. The Bible is clear, for example, about parental authority and accountability, about the innate selfishness of every human heart and about absolute right and wrong. There are many in positions of influence who would hold quite other views. Sadly, I have discovered that some Christians have unconsciously swallowed the sugar-coated secularist pill and are blind to some serious flaws in much of what is written and promoted by health professionals, teachers and media parenting gurus. Other Christian parents, who are valiantly trying to follow the Bible's unfashionable precepts, are obliged to brace themselves because they are going very much against the tide. And sometimes it is hard.

Christians, whatever the prevailing political or cultural wind, are called to march to God's beat. As strangers and pilgrims here, and as we hope and pray that our children will join us in heaven, we have a serious purpose, and sooner or later that will mean in various ways going against the tide.

So here is another book on parenting. What I have tried to do is look at a plethora of issues on which thinking, Bible-believing parents may find themselves at odds with their non-Christian neighbours. Some, but not all, of these issues are controversial. Where there is divided opinion I have not backed off but have attempted to bring Biblical principles to bear. Let the reader decide.

In writing this book I also want to state at the outset that I am aware that there are plenty of non-Christians who do a pretty good job of bringing up decent, well-behaved children. Of course there are. Such parents have recognised and applied good sense

and ignored nonsense and that policy has paid off. But there is a huge difference between believers and unbelievers in motivation, ambition and destination. So there will be distinctions which we need to acknowledge. And there will be concerns which are of no interest to those who have no concept of eternity. Christians know there is more at stake here than worldly prosperity and a healthy lifestyle.

If, in the course of the argument, I seem to be occasionally harsh or sweeping, I beg the reader's pardon. I write out of the very warmest of hearts towards today's parents and even more, towards their children. And I do so because I stand on God's infallible word and delight to see Jesus Christ glorified in Christian family life. My aim is to warn the unwary and encourage the stout-hearted.

So let us begin.