

BOOK IN REVIEW

Parenting for a Better World: *Social Justice Practices for Your Family and the Planet*

EDITED BY SUSANNA SNYDER AND ELLEN OTT MARSHALL

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Reviewed by Jessica Gregory

There are many Christian parenting books, but *Parenting for a Better World: Social Justice Practices for Your Family and the Planet* is a worthy addition. Through Scripture and personal experience, the contributors suggest to families how they might engage their faith in concrete and specific ways to bring about change in their communities.

Unlike books that tell parents they should, need, and/or must do something to be “good” parents, *Parenting for a Better World* is much kinder and more realistic in its expectations. In the introduction, aptly titled “It’s Just Too Hard,” editors Susanna Snyder and Ellen Ott Marshall write: “We’re not presenting a blueprint for action. Rather, we are sharing some ideas that have emerged through our own struggles.” This book is written by real Christian parents for real Christian parents; the contributors share how they marry parenting and passionate social justice acts together, acknowledging that working parents simply don’t have the time to do them separately. These marriages are not perfect or easy, but they are “good enough,” which is a lot. If the book has a weakness, it’s that the contributors all either work in academia or in the field about which they write. As diverse as the contributors are, in that way, it is a limited range of perspectives.

In his “Interruptive Listening” chapter, dad and assistant curate at St. Paul’s in Bedford, England, Luke Lerner acknowledges that he is a motor-mouth, and then writes compellingly about the sacred daily practice of interruptive listening. This requires not just listening while you wait for your turn to speak, but listening with complete focus on the person speaking, despite the interruption to your own thoughts. This is important even – and perhaps especially – when that person is your child. Such attention to others, he proposes, can lead “toward the flourishing of society and world withing the course of our daily lives.”

As one who listens a lot, I know it is incredibly hard, but it is also something that can be tried repeatedly and taught to people of all ages. Recently, I offered a children’s message at church about this concept. It began with me interrupting a child telling the punchline of a joke to illustrate in a funny but also clear way that when we interrupt, verbally or in our heads, we can miss the point.

This book is full of potential children’s messages! It would also be great for a parenting small group, or for Christian educators to pull from as a curriculum supplement. Churches with family ministries programs could try out some of the ideas geared to group participation like community organizing, protesting and cultivating a garden. Chapters can also be read alone, if a group wants to focus on one of the practices highlighted or if a parent only has time to read one a few pages. Either way, the book is a thought-provoking, interesting and inspirational read that I highly recommend.



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