

The Smell of Parenting

Proverbs 14:4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox. ESV

A novice farmer shows off his clean barn to his neighbor. The ground is spotless, and the manger, or feed trough, looks as clean as new. After shooting the breeze a while the experienced farmer invites his friend to come and see what a barn should look like. The young farmer is a little hurt because he can't imagine a nicer setup than he has.

They walk over to the neighbor's farm, all the while discussing the incredible amount of work each of the older farmer's four oxen can perform. At the barn, hay is strewn everywhere, and the feed trough is covered with dried ox slobber.

"What is that horrible stench?" asks the young man.

"That, my friend, is the smell of money."

The goal of a farmer is not to have the nicest barn, cleanest trough, or freshest fragrances. His goal is to grow crops and raise animals. To focus on his goal, he lets a few things slide along the way. From sunup to sundown he works hard. He is not lazy or negligent, but he simply has no time to clean troughs and rake out barns. Instead of scooping up every piece of manure, he simply wears rubber boots.

A wise parent will take a similar approach. If every meal must be a culinary delight, every toy in its perfect spot, every shelf dusted, and every floor vacuumed, there will be no time left for parenting. With children comes a certain level of messiness. This is to be managed, but also expected. The goal is to raise the children, not eliminate the messiness. As the farmer embraces the mess of the ox the parent should embrace the clutter of childhood. Far more critical things are happening in our homes than keeping our houses spotless. Much good is being produced in a Christian home.