

# Toys As Tools

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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When our children were very young, I wanted to protect them as much as I could from the world around them. I can recall taking my son to a department store rest room where he read to me what was written on the stall wall. I thought, "My son is being taught about life and this world by the words on a bathroom wall!"

As much as is within our power, we all want our children to be ready to fit into the world tomorrow, to be able to be used as God sees fit. We try to protect their minds as much as possible from the violence, sex, and other wrong thinking this world produces. This is one of our duties as parents (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Proverbs 22:6).

As our children grow through childhood, they are taught by many methods: ourselves, the school system, their peers, television, movies and books. But the one area of teaching we may overlook is in the toys we allow our children to play with. Toys teach!

## **A Toy Is a Tool!**

The word "toy" comes from an old Danish word meaning "tool." In a very real sense, *a toy is a tool of learning.*

In years past, a young son would imitate his father—his hero—by playing with miniatures of the tools his father used in whatever trade or profession provided the family living. A daughter would imitate her mother in sewing, having her own small garden, helping in cooking, caring for her dolls, etc.

Today, for the most part, children's heroes are not their moms or dads. Today's children are bombarded with movies, television and comic books showing many heroes that seem much more exciting than dad and mom could ever be. After all, parents only feed, clothe, shelter, nurture, teach and love them. With today's value system, how can parents compare favorably?

Today's heroes are frequently fantasy characters like Batman, Robo Cop, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, dinosaurs, Dirty Harry, the Terminator, G.I. Joe and robots of all kinds—all of them armed to the teeth. These heroes solve their problems with weapons or equipment designed to destroy their enemies. With all the power they possess, they are totally self-reliant.

Toy manufacturers are quick to duplicate these weapons and market them to our children, who in turn live out "harmless" fantasies of shooting and killing. God, of course, says not to kill (Exodus 20:13)!

The world's education of our children in this seemingly innocuous way has helped produce a generation in pain. Observe the terrible penalty of death and destruction that follows in the wake of our gun-toting teenagers today.

Granted, the toys this generation played with are not the total cause of what we see, but the acting out of violence over and over in play does contribute to the problem.

### General Guidelines

What can we do to ensure our children are playing with proper toys? What general criteria should we use when considering the purchase of a toy?

1. Will what the toy teaches be of value in the Kingdom of God? This is not an absolute requirement but needs to be considered.
2. Will the toy help the child fulfill the role God intended them to have as a boy or a girl? Again, there is nothing overtly harmful if a boy sometimes plays with a doll or a girl with a truck. Generally, though, children should play with toys that will help boys to develop their masculinity and girls their femininity.
3. Will the toy cause the child to stretch and improve his mind? We should consider, "What is the result I want for my child from this game or toy?"

Does every toy have to be serious? Some silly and just plain fun toys should always be included to give a proper mix.

Today's educational toys cover a wide range and teach a variety of subjects, like chemistry, mathematics, flight, agriculture, photography, cooking, sewing, etc. We are truly blessed with many toys and games that teach positive, uplifting subjects, principles and skills.

One might think from reading this article that our children should never be allowed to handle weapons of violence. Does prohibiting our children to play with toy guns mean our children cannot shoot a rifle or go hunting? Of course not. Many children have been out shooting and have owned rifles, but the key is that they were never allowed to *play* with guns. They were instructed to handle and use them correctly and safely.

God has a great deal to say about the peace and the lack of violence that will soon break upon this world. He will soon eradicate hatred and killing from the hearts of His people.

- "*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain*" (Isaiah 11:9).
- "*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*" (Isaiah 2:4).
- "*He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: he will dwell on high*" (Isaiah 33:15-16).

With all the problems facing our world, wrong toys may seem an insignificant evil. But over a young lifetime, right toys and games can help produce a positive result that will be carried over into the world tomorrow.

I hope these guidelines will help all of us as parents and grandparents to purchase helpful, exciting, right tools—toys—for our children.