

GIVING A STRONG SPIRITUAL LEGACY

Every believing parent hopes his or her child will embrace the faith and grow deep spiritual roots. But studies tell us that over half of those growing up in Christian homes will walk away from Christianity by the time they leave their teen years. Too often parents “outsource” the spiritual formation of their children to the church. While a good church is very important, God designed the family to be the primary place where faith is nurtured.

These four guiding principles can help you be more intentional about your child’s faith.

The Legacy Principle

Scripture tells us that what we do today directly influences the multi-generational cycle of family traits, beliefs and actions – for good or bad (Exodus 20:5-6, Psalm 78:5-8). Passing a strong faith to our children begins by having a strong faith ourselves. Some of us need to break negative cycles that may have started with our own upbringing in order to launch a new, improved legacy for the next generation.

The Relationship Principle

In the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the values of their parents. Proverbs 22:6 tells us that when children learn right from wrong at home under the nurturing, loving training of parents, they tend to adopt mom and dad’s beliefs. While there are no guarantees (every child has a free will), children are far more likely to embrace their parents’ faith if they enjoy their parents’ company! This is a big part of the reason the Bible warns parents not to “*provoke your children to wrath*” but rather “*bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). A strong relationship with mom and dad is key to a strong Christian faith. Parents need to be intentional about capturing and creating opportunities to nurture the roots of faith in their children.

The Lenses Principle

Jesus taught that our enemy’s primary weapon is deception (John 8:44). Our children are growing up in a culture that bombards them with lies. An hour or two per week at church is no match for the hundreds of hours spent with media, school, and friends. It is the job of parents to equip children with the corrective “lenses” of truth so they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

**And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them
when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and
when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:6–7**

The Learning Principle

Our children can only learn what we teach them in a manner that will reach them. In other words, we need to vary our approach based upon their unique personality, learning style, and stage of development. Children fall into one of three stages that should guide the methods we choose for discussing our faith and values at home.

THE IMPRINT PERIOD: Toddler to About Age Seven

Small children are all ears. Young children will believe it because mom or dad said it – so this is an ideal season for teaching them basic Bible stories, memorization, and other building block truths of Christianity.

THE IMPRESSION PERIOD: About Age Eight to Early Teen

Children no longer accept what we say at face value. They need to know what their parents believe even though they may question us, push back, or even argue. They also need help understanding the rationale behind those beliefs. This is all a positive part of their faith development because it means they have grown past blind acceptance and are ready for deeper understanding.

THE COACHING PERIOD: Early Teen to Young Adult

Our job changes when the kids enter the coaching period. We can motivate, encourage, challenge and advise. We can't force feed. We can help them clearly articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking, remind them of the "basics" learned during the "practices" of the imprint and impression years. We can provide a safe environment for our teen to wrestle with, even question, the values they've learned. Maintaining strong relationship and frequent dialogue are the key to your influence now.

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GOING FURTHER RESOURCES

It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith

by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope

Challenge leaders to restore their homes as the proving ground of meaningful success.

Your Heritage: How to be Intentional About the Legacy You Leave

by Kurt Bruner & J. Otis Ledbetter

How to strengthen your roots by understanding the heritage you were given and charting a new course for the future.

Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community

by Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof

Provides a practical and revolutionary approach to parenting using five creative principles.

Intentional Parenting: 10 Ways to be an Exceptional Parent in a Quick Fix World

by Doug & Cathy Fields

Solid principles to help you move from Quick-Fix Parenting to Intentional Parenting.

Teaching Kids about God: An age by age plan for parents of children from birth to age twelve

by John Trent Ph.D., Rick Osborne, Kurt Bruner

From the parenting experts at Focus on the Family, a practical resource to help you teach your children what they need to know about God at every age and stage.

MovieNightChat.com

Recommends films and spiritual discussion ideas for parent/teen movie nights.
