

How Parents Can Help Their Children Go to Heaven

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When a Jew is asked, “What manner of child shall this be?” (Luke 1:66), he replies, “He will be a Jew.” And ninety-nine out of a hundred times, he will be right.

When a Catholic is asked the same question, he replies, “He will be a Catholic.” And nine times out of ten, he will be right. Francis Xavier, Catholic educator observed, “Give me a child until he is seven, and anyone else can have him for life.”

When Christians are asked the question, they reply, “Who knows?”

Isn't this an indication that we are not exerting as strong an influence in our children's lives as we should? The Bible demands that parents properly influence their children (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Certainly outside influences may turn our children, but may it never be said that one of our children was lost due to a lack of effort or wisdom. The stakes are just too high for excuses and regrets.

How can we best influence our children for God?

LIMIT THE DISTANCE

It is possible to bowl a 300 game every time. It is possible to hit a bull's eye ten times in a row. How? Take the ball, walk down the lane and bowl from 15 feet instead of 60 feet! Stand two feet away from the target, reach toward the target, and pull the trigger. Accuracy improves with proximity.

The same is true with children: accuracy increases with proximity. Or to state it negatively, error increases with distance. It is important to be near our families—to spend copious amounts of time with them. Many homes today are mere filling stations. People come and go; they pass each other in the kitchen in the morning and again at night. That is no way to rear children. The intent of this is not to send us on a guilt trip, but to cause us to reflect on what is really important. “Hands

on” attention is required. A wise woman “buildeth her house” (Proverbs 14:1). A good father's life is “bound up” with his son (Genesis 44:30).

Many parents combine to work seventy-five to one hundred hours a week. Weekends are tied up with golf, fishing, hunting, cleaning, shopping, and errands. Many children spend more time with daycare workers or grandparents than they do with their own mom and dad. Let it never be said that a Christian father spent more time on his golf swing than he did on his offspring. Let it never be said that a mom was more interested in career advancement than her children (Titus 2:4-5).

The debate about quality time versus quantity time continues, and there is something to be said about quality time. It is possible to be in the same room with your children but be a hundred miles away from them at the same time. We can bury our noses in a newspaper or lose ourselves behind a computer screen, and never exchange more than a couple sentences an hour with the others in the room. Watching the same television screen hardly constitutes spending time together.

At the same time, quality time simply cannot be substituted for quantity time. We can never predict when a teachable moment will show itself. Moses instructed Israelite parents to be ready when the moment came: “And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son . . .” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:20–21). Most teaching is done in a cumulative fashion. Isaiah said it this way: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10).

START EARLY (2 TIMOTHY 3:15; CF. 1:5)

Samuel's training started as soon as he was weaned—in fact even before that (1 Samuel 2:18). Josiah was taught to seek the Lord as a boy (2 Chronicles 34:3). The psalmist learned to trust God from his youth, because he was taught of God from his youth (Psalm 71:5, 17). John the Baptist followed holiness “from his mother's womb” (Luke 1:15). Jesus was about His Father's business early in life (Luke 2:40, 49).

Let each parent say to his or her offspring, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the

Lord” (Psalm 34:11). Parents should put their children in the Bible school nursery class as soon as they can be taken from home. This is much better than waiting until they are ready for the preschool Bible class. Consider Isaiah's words: “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts” (Isaiah 28:9). A mother once asked a child psychologist when she was to start training her child. He asked how old the child was. Being told he was five years old, he said, “Hurry home. You have already lost the best five years of your child's life.”

By exposing children to the Bible in their early years, they have the best opportunity to know the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10–16). “Give . . . to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Proverbs 1:4).

Why start early? (1) *Because the days of opportunity are few.* From birth to the eighteenth birthday is only 6,570 days. These will pass much more quickly than we think. Add to this that teaching opportunities are greatly limited during the first two years (due to capacity), and the last four (due to natural resistance), so the days are reduced to 4380. Remove sick days, busy days, days spent away from parents, and school days when interaction is very limited, and truly we see that we must be “redeeming the time, for the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)

(2) *Because the heart may later close to spiritual instruction.* Solomon said that the Creator should be remembered in youth because “evil days” will come when the child may say, “I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1). A pediatrician once observed that rearing children is like baking a cake—you don't realize you've got a disaster until it's too late! It is refreshing today to see so many parents “working hard in the kitchen” to see that their little ones turn out sweet and delightful.

(3) *Because the Word has the power to make a difference.* “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9; cf. Romans 1:16). The Word hidden in their hearts will keep them from sinning against God (Psalm 119:11).

TALK IT UP

We must cultivate religion as the chief topic of conversation and concern in the home. The Hebrews were commanded: “Thou . . . shalt talk of them” (Deuteronomy 6:7; cf. 32:46). “The Hebrews were extremely successful at making religion an integral part of life. The reason for their success was that religious education was life-oriented, not information-oriented. They used the context of daily life to teach about God. The key to teaching your children to love God is stated clearly in these verses. If you want your children to follow God, you must make God part of your everyday experiences. You must teach your children to see God in all aspects of life, not just those that are church related.”

Our words are a mason’s trowel that daily shapes the hardening cement of children’s character. They are the swift stream that gradually wears the rough places off of the stones.

Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). Thus, if the Lord’s church is on our hearts (as it should be), we will often speak of it. Moses and Elijah talked about Jesus’ decease (Luke 9:30–31). Two disciples on the road to Emmaus talked of the spiritual things (Luke 24:14–32). Candace’s treasurer and Philip talked of Isaiah and Jesus as they rode in a chariot together (Acts 8:30–37).

Christian homes do not reserve religious topics for Sundays. The Bible and the church are constantly talked about around the dinner table. Talking to God through Jesus is just as natural as talking to grandma or about their friends at school. Jesus has an invisible chair at the kitchen table, a place on the couch in the living room, and takes every trip with us.

The speech about the church should be positive, of course. The Sunday meal must never consist of stewed elders, roasted preachers, grilled Bible teachers, and baked song leaders. Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45).

Think of this verse in terms of parenting: “The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom” (Proverbs 10:21). Malachi said that those who “feared the Lord spake often one to another” (Malachi 3:16). We should exhort our children daily, lest they become “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). We must consider ways to provoke them “unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:24). What better guidelines could ever have been written on child development than these? “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient” at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

LET THEM SMELL THE ALTAR SMOKE

Everywhere Abraham went with his family, he worshipped God (e.g., Genesis 12:7–8; 13:4; 21:33). You could trace his journeys by the smoke of his altars. Then we study the life of Isaac and we find the same thing characterized him (Genesis 26:25).

Similarly, how encouraging it must be for Christian parents to see their children establish their own homes and begin immediately with family devotions. Families should read their Bibles together. The home must contain food for the soul as well as food for the body (1 Peter 2:1–2; Matthew 5:6). Families should pray together. It is still true that families who pray together stay together. Now is the time to engage in regular family devotions (Deuteronomy 4:5–10; 6:6–9; cf. Jeremiah 10:25).

Let us all daily repeat “the parent’s prayer”—“Teach us what we shall do unto the child” (Judges 13:8)—and use every opportunity to plant gospel seeds in our children’s fertile hearts.

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