

Training Our Kids to Serve God

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The Lord's church has always had to face many problems, but of all of those problems, perhaps the most serious is the horrific rate of spiritual attrition among our children. Surveys tell us that something like 50 percent of children who are "raised in the church" will not become faithful Christians themselves. In some churches, the rate is even higher. I know of one church in this area where the preacher estimates that they lose 70 percent of their kids.

That's dismaying enough in the abstract, but it becomes even more ghastly when we think of that loss rate happening here. In this congregation, we're blessed with mobs of children. We love them dearly, and they bring such life and joy to our church. It would be a tragedy if even one of the children here this morning were to miss out on eternal life. Losing half of them is unthinkable. Consider your own family this morning. If you have two kids and the statistical trend holds true, one of them is going to be eternally lost. If you have three, you're looking at losing as many as two of them. What greater disaster can there be for a parent than to know that your son or daughter has rejected God?

That horrible 50 percent statistic is the way things are, but it's not the way that things have to be, at least not here. The church leadership here is committed to doing everything we can to keep our children faithful, and we invest a lot of effort in making sure that our children's classes are as effective as possible. However, the greatest spiritual impact on a child doesn't come from the elders or the Bible-class teachers. It comes from the parents, and frankly, a lot of parents fail to have the impact they should. They agree in the abstract that they need to work to get their kids to heaven, but they aren't willing to invest the time and the commitment to make it happen. And then, 20 years down the road, they wonder why their kids aren't faithful. Let's be better than that. Let's devote ourselves to training our kids to serve God.

Specific Actions.

As the old saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words," and nowhere is that more true than in our dealings with our children. We can tell them all we want that God is important, but unless they can see in our lives that God is important to us, we'll be wasting our breath. One of the most important things we can do to emphasize how important God is is to **ASSEMBLE FAITHFULLY**. We need to have the spirit expressed by the psalmist in Ps. 84:1-2. Worship needs to be so important to us that we are here every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and every Wednesday night.

I know this is not an easy commitment to make. I know we live in a busy world with all sorts of demands on our time. However, friends, if we choose to assemble with the saints every time the doors are open, regardless of what else is going on in our lives, that sends our children a powerful message about how important God is. On the other hand, if we let our busy lives control us, and we assemble once a week, or once every couple of weeks, that also sends our children a powerful message about how important God is, and when they aren't assembling at all twenty years from now, it will show that they heard the message loud and clear. I was blessed with godly parents, parents who to this day attend every worship service they're physically able to make it out to, and if we didn't show up ten minutes early for services, we were late. And you know what? When I got out on my own, and I was living a thousand miles away from my parents, not once did the thought of skipping services ever cross my mind. It wasn't an option for them, so it wasn't an option for me.

Second, if we want our kids to be faithful, we must **STUDY WITH THEM**, or at least study where they can see us doing it. The importance of the Bible to the lives of our youngsters cannot be overstated. Look with me at Psalm 119:9. The heart of our conception of Christianity is that we are able to study, understand, and apply the word for ourselves, and if our children don't form that connection with the Scripture for themselves, they will never be true Christians. However, if we want them to have that connection, they have to see it present in our lives. How much do we value the word? Do we take time from our busy schedules to read the Bible on our own? Are we involved in studying it with others? Do we help our children with their Bible lessons on Saturday night so that they'll be prepared for class Sunday morning? Or, instead, do we just leave our Bibles in the car all the time so we don't have to remember to bring them to services? Do our children never even have their lesson books, period, because they got buried under a pile of dirty clothes in the bedroom sometime around Week Two, and we never cared enough to make them dig them out? Once again, brethren, actions speak louder than words. No matter what our behavior toward the word is, it's sending a message, and it's going to be that message that shapes our kids' attitude toward Scripture. Let's send the right message.

Just as we must study with them to send that right message, we must also **PRAY WITH THEM**. Look at the example of the Christians in Tyre in Acts 21:5-6. Remember, friends, these were people with busy lives just like we have. And yet, they took time out from their schedules to take their whole families outside the city to see Paul off, and then, to kneel down with their families on the beach and pray with him. That's the last time we read about the church in Tyre, but I'm quite certain that those children remembered that time of prayer for the rest of their lives.

Like them, we must also carve out times of prayer with our families in our lives. This can begin with something as simple as prayer at mealtimes. Instead of everybody grabbing a plate and then heading off to the bedroom or the den or wherever, it's far better if we pray as a family, and then eat as a family. The prayer can be short, but we have to make sure that we actually mean it instead of unthinkingly reciting the mealtime-prayer ritual. It's also useful to pray with our children at bedtime, before we go on a trip or vacation, in times of sickness, or anywhere else a prayer seems appropriate or useful. This emphasis on prayer will train our children to have a life of prayer themselves.

Fourth, we should **TALK ABOUT GOD**. We see this emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:6-7. What we're talking about here isn't as formal as a Bible study. As the Scripture says, out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks, and if our hearts are full of God, our speech is going to reflect that. God will always be part of the conversation just because He's important to us. This is especially important in our decision-making process. God and His word need to be the primary influence on the choices we make. When our kids ask us if they can try out for some sport, we need to discuss it with them in terms of the impact that will have on our church attendance. When they want to go to homecoming or prom, we must discuss with them whether they can go and still be righteous. When they're considering different choices for college, we need to urge them to think about what the church situation is in each location and what that will do for them spiritually. What's more, they need to see that same emphasis on God in our decision-making process too. When we train them to think in this way, we're training them to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first.

Finally, in the realm of concrete actions, we need to **WORK FOR GOD**. Jesus highlights the importance of an example of good works in Matthew 5:16. Nowhere is this example more important than with our kids. No matter who we are, one thing is universally true for all of us. The way we spend our time and the way we spend our money reveals what's important to us, and we will never be able to hide our priorities from our children. They're not dumb. If we talk a big game about how God is the most important thing, but we give four hours a week to Him and twenty to watching football, they'll see right through that. If we spend thousands of dollars a year on smartphones and big-screen TV's, but we say we can only afford to put ten dollars in the collection plate every week, they'll see right through that too. However, if they see us constantly engaged in the work of the Lord, if we're always preparing to teach classes or showing up for workdays at the building or being hospitable or visiting the sick and shut-ins, that is when our actions really back up our rhetoric. Unless we're dedicated to walking the walk, talking the talk is just a bunch of hot air.

General Attitudes.

Even as we work on those specific attitudes, though, there are a couple of general mindsets and attitudes that we must capture too. The first of these is that we must **AVOID HYPOCRISY**. Along these lines, it's quite revealing to consider Jesus' comments about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:15. If we want to understand this passage, we must ask why it was that any proselyte the Pharisees converted to Judaism became twice as bad as they were. The answer is simple. Because the Pharisees were hypocrites, anyone who learned the Law from them also learned their hypocrisy.

Brethren, if there is anyone out there who is going to see through our hypocrisy, it is our children. As has been a theme throughout this lesson, our children know who we really are because they live with us. They see what we actually do when we aren't pretending to be someone else. If we nod our heads all the way through the sermon on ungodly entertainment, and then come home and watch filth on cable TV, our children will know. If we condemn drinking and drunkenness in Bible class, but then come home and booze it up, our children will know. If we claim to follow the Prince of peace, but lash out angrily at our families whenever things don't go our way, our children will know. Basically, it's almost as hard to fool our kids as it is to fool God, and whoever we really are, that's who they will imitate. If we are hypocrites, we will either raise a generation of little hypocrites, or our children will be disgusted by our hypocrisy, strike out on their own, and become honest, straightforward sinners. This doesn't mean that we have to be perfect to raise godly kids. However, it does mean that we must be dedicated to discipleship instead of to secret pleasure.

Finally, if we want to lead our children to heaven, we must **LIVE JOYFULLY**. Listen to Paul's words in Philippians 4:4. The truth is, friends, that we can do everything else I've talked about in this lesson and still be sending our kids the wrong message. If we assemble faithfully with the saints every time the doors are open, but we bellyache all the way there about how we don't want to go and how bad the preaching and singing are, that's not motivating them to go themselves. If we make decisions based on God's will, but we complain about how boring and hard it is to do what's right, that's not encouraging them to follow in our footsteps. If we spend our lives with this dark cloud hovering over our heads, and our relationship with God only adds to the misery, they're not going to want to live like us.

In reality, friends, Christianity is joyful, and if we don't have that joy, we're missing the boat. God didn't hand down His laws to make us miserable. Instead, they guide us to prosper and be happy. We can continue to rejoice even though the difficult passages of our lives, because we know God will get us through them. That unending hope, that unending joy, will send more of a message to our kids than anything else that this Christianity thing is really worth doing. When they see our joy, they will want to be disciples themselves, so that their joy will also be made full.