

INTENTIONAL

Parenting

If you are blessed with the gift of children, God has given you the most incredible opportunity and responsibility to help your child know, love, and follow Jesus. Every believing parent hopes their child will embrace the faith and grow deep spiritual roots. Studies tell us that over half of those growing up in Christian homes will walk away from Christianity by the time they leave the teen years. One reason is that parents often “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

The scriptures tell 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, modeling the gospel in our marriages and in how we relate to those closest to us. 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 Likelihood Principle

The good news is that 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 their parents’ beliefs. While there are no guarantees because every child has a free will, kids are far more likely to embrace their parent’s 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). Bottom line - a strong relationship with Mom and Dad is key to a strong Christian faith.

The Lenses Principle

Jesus taught that our enemy’s primary weapon is deception - getting us to believe and live according to lies rather than truth (John 8:44). When someone is deceived, he or she doesn’t know it! Our children are growing up in a culture that often 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 cannot compete with a child’s fallen nature that often wants to rebel against what is good, true and beautiful. 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.

The Learning Principle

Our children can only learn what we teach them in a manner that reaches them. We need to vary our approach based upon their unique personality, learning style, and stage of development. Children fall into one of three developmental periods. Understanding the different stages of development can help parents become intentional about creating and capturing opportunities to nurture the roots of faith in their children.

THE IMPRINT PERIOD (Toddler to About Age Seven): Small children are all ears. They will believe it because mom or dad said it, much like a baby gosling that imprints itself onto its mother and follows it wherever she leads. Young children soak in what we tell them - 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): During this season, children no longer accept what we say at face value. They may question us, push back, or even argue. During this season, children need to know what we believe. They also need help understanding the rationale behind those beliefs. While more work, this is a positive part of their faith development because it means they have grown past blind acceptance and are ready for deeper understanding. Take opportunities to have faith conversations and to weave holy habits into the fabric of your home (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

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

Intentional Parenting: Autopilot is for Planes

By Sissy Goff, David Thomas, and Melissa Trevathan

It Starts At Home by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope

Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family

by Paul David Tripp

WATERLOO ROAD SUPPORT

Family Time and Holiday Resources

Available for free at the Faith@Home Center.

Faith Path

Free age-appropriate kits are available for parents to guide a child's spiritual journey one step at a time. Stop by the Childhood Desk.

Childhood & Preteen Ministries

WRBC offers a variety of programs that come alongside parents in their effort to instill faith in children including Parent/Child Dedication, age-graded Sunday School classes, Awana, camps, and much more. For more information, visit waterlooroad.org/childhood or waterlooroad.org/preteen or contact Emily Townley at Emily@waterlooroad.org.

Student Ministries

In an effort to come alongside parents, WRBC sponsors a range of ministries for teens. For more information, visit waterlooroad.org/ministry/students/ or contact Reid Jackson at Reid@waterlooroad.org.

