

INTENTIONAL PARENTING

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 back away from Christian commitment by the time they leave the teen years. Too often, parents “outsource” the spiritual formation of their children to the church. And while a good church is very important, God designed the family to be the primary place where faith is nurtured. So parents need to understand four principles that can help them become more intentional about their 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). So passing a strong faith to our children begins by having a strong faith ourselves – and 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 better legacy for the next generation.

THE LIKELIHOOD PRINCIPLE:

The good news is this: 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 because every child has a free will, kids are far more likely to embrace their parent’s faith if they have a strong relationship with their parents. That’s why the bible warns us not to “exasperate” our kids but rather “nurture them in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

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 hours spent with media, school, and friends. Nor can it compete with a child’s fallen nature that often wants to rebel against what is good, true and beautiful. It is the mission and calling of parents to equip children with the corrective “lenses” of truth so they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

THE LEARNING PRINCIPLE:

We need to vary our approach towards teaching our children based upon their unique personality, learning style, and stage of development. Children fall into one of three stages that can guide how we discuss our faith and values at home.

THE IMPRINT PERIOD: (toddler to about age seven)

Small children are all ears and soak in what we teach them. They believe it because mom or dad said it. This is an ideal season for teaching them basic bible stories, memorization, and basic 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 and may question us, push back, or even argue. During this season, children do need to know what we believe, as well as help understanding the rationale behind those beliefs. This is a positive part of their faith development because they’ve grown past blind acceptance and are ready for deeper understanding.

THE COACHING PERIOD: (early teen to young adult)

In this period, we can motivate, encourage, challenge and advise. We can help them clearly articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking, remind them of the “basics” learned during the imprint and impression years. We can provide a safe environment to wrestle with, even question, the values they’ve learned. A strong and open relationship is the key to your influence now.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- Faith4families.org
- The Faith Box – Annual Parenting Plan
- **It Starts At Home** by Kurt Bruner & Steve Stroope
- **Your Heritage: How to be Intentional About the Legacy You Leave** by Kurt Bruner
- **Parents’ Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children** by John Trent, Rick Osborne & Kurt Bruner
- **Parent’s Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens** by Joe White & Jim Weidmann
- Videos on RightNowMedia