

TEACHING YOUR CHILD ABOUT GOD

Of all valuable treasures there is none like the precious life of a child. As parents, we all share the same hopes and dreams for our children. Before a child is even born, images of health and happiness fill our minds. We have high hopes for success as our children grow to maturity. Parents want their children to do well in school, with a good intellect and to grow physically strong and healthy. Parents also envision their children having many friends and happy times with others. However, some families value something else that supercedes the intellectual, physical, social and emotional areas of development. This area of growth is spiritual - how a child relates to God. In Psalm 78 we read about the importance of transmitting faith to our children. This scripture says: "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done...then they will put their trust in God." While many of us desire that our children grow spiritually as they come to know and love God, we are often not sure how we can best accomplish that. And, spiritual growth just doesn't happen, it needs to be purposefully planned and intentionally nurtured. Our efforts to transmit our faith can be effective and last a life time, but it takes patience and a great deal of effort.... and many times even sacrifice. Here are some tips to help your child grow spiritually and develop a deep and enduring love for the Lord.

CHILDREN ARE A GIFT FROM GOD

Always be aware of the great treasure and potential of your child. You have a priceless opportunity to nurture your child's "innermost being". The home environment provides the most powerful influence on positive emotional and spiritual growth. Watch over your priceless treasure. Consider it an investment of your time and energy that will reap tremendous returns. Examine what surrounds your child daily that pulls your child away from God. Do your best to eliminate or diminish the influence of these things. A good example is unhealthy media.

LOOK AT YOURSELF FIRST

Much of what a child learns is "caught" rather than "taught". The reflection of your faith in God will form the lasting image and concept your child has about God. Is your faith based on a list of rules and obligations? Does your spiritual life lack vitality and authenticity? Hopefully, what your child sees is your deep dependence on God and consistent expressions of God's love in your relationships and daily choices.

ATTITUDE & ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Bible stories are not enough. Recalling factual knowledge about the Bible is not an accurate predictor of spiritual sensitivity and growth. Children develop deeply held beliefs from attitudes and feelings established during the early years. In fact, family relationships of trust and belongingness become the foundation for a child's ability to eventually place a full and complete trust in God.

CONNECT BIBLE WORDS TO THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCES AND ACTIONS

Recognize and take advantage of natural opportunities to point your child to God. Everyday experiences can bring numerous openings to transmit faith to a child. Responding to a child's questions or ideas can guide the conversation toward God. Words like "I'm so glad God brought your father home safely." or "Let's ask God to help us find the road we missed." are teachable moments that have great spiritual significance to a child. Connect words to the child's actions to maximize impact. "I can see you did the kind thing by letting Krista go first on the slide." When you notice behavior that pleases God, it helps create in the child's mind a picture of himself as one who is kind and loving. Another spiritual opportunity can be captured by establishing routines of family mealtimes and bedtime prayers.

LET THE BIBLE BE A PART OF YOUR FAMILY LIFE

The Bible should be a centerpiece in your home; it should be seen as the source of truth. How often does your child see you reading God's word? Do you encourage reading and viewing Christian media in your home? Contemporary Bibles and bible related materials can help the child's understanding of Bible concepts. Family nights and eating meals together provide good opportunities to extend spiritual matters, as well as have fun together in the home.

YOU NEED CHURCH TO HELP YOU

Relationships are key to spiritual growth. You and your child must connect with others within a church family that can provide the support and encouragement needed to nurture spiritual growth. Children's ministries can be a powerful means of bringing your child together with peers to study and learn about God at his or her own age level. Don't neglect church-going! In a busy, hectic world, your family cannot do without this vital institution. Let church become a normal routine for your children.

PLACE HIGH PRIORITY ON CAREFULLY CONSIDERING CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING

Many families worry about the cost of college or future expenses for their children. Yet, the most important years, ones of utmost influence, are the early years. This is an opportunity to give a strong biblical foundation to your child in a community of learners that intentionally and systematically support and strengthen the family's spiritual focus. Don't dismiss the window of opportunity that you have to give your child the gift of a Christian education. Have you considered that many grandparents assist in making this financially possible for families?

Childhood will pass by quickly. You want your small treasure to grow to be a woman of virtue or a man of character. Why not capture the moments when little hearts are most open to God and His Son, Jesus. For your reflection: Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9 in several versions, translations and paraphrased editions of the Bible.