

Here's How to Build a Legacy of Faith for Your Children

Research and experience both support the truth that parents are the single most important factor in determining a child's view of God and whether or not faith will become a cornerstone of his or her adult life. Although it is a great responsibility, moms and dads need not panic at the daunting thought.

In *Pass It On: Building a Legacy of Faith for Your Children through Practical and Memorable Experiences* (David C Cook), HomeWord president Jim Burns and founder Jeremy Lee give parents a year-by-year plan for sharing rites of passage that will set the foundation for their child's faith.

Q: Why is it important for parents to create a spiritual legacy for their children?

Burns: We have a phrase at HomeWord: "One of the major opportunities of the church is to mentor parents; parents mentor their children, and the legacy of faith of continues from generation to generation." Authorities tell us that the greatest influence in a young person's life is mom and then dad. It's time for parents to get serious about being intentional with spiritual legacy.

Lee: Parents are the greatest spiritual influence in the life of their child. In short, their words weigh more than anyone else's words. If they're willing to have faith-based conversations and model their faith, they have a great chance of passing that faith on to their child.

Q: Explain what you mean when you ask parents to think "generationally."

Lee: Parents are not just parents. They are the spiritual

patriarchs or matriarchs for the next three-to-four generations, meaning what they do today doesn't just matter for their kids, but for their grandkids, great-grandkids and beyond. When you think about it from that perspective, you see that passing on your faith as a parent is not something to be afraid of, but an occasion to rise to.

Burns: Several times in the Old Testament we learn you can “inherit the sins” of a previous generation to the third and fourth generations or at least inherit the “sin bent” of the previous generations. However, the Scripture is also clear that the love of God can influence for 1,000 years. Even for parents who come from somewhat dysfunctional families like Cathy and I did, they can make a commitment to be the “transitional generation.” We had to make a decision early in our marriage and parenting to either “repeat or recover” from those past generational sins. When a parent chooses to recover, part of the recovery is passing on a healthy faith to the next generation. Passing on key topics, celebrations and traditions like we have in the book, becomes an easy way to make that happen.

Q: The thought of orchestrating a spiritual legacy for your family can seem daunting. How does *Pass It On* help simplify and clarify the task?

Lee: The reason I love *Pass It On* is because it's not just a book you read, it's a book you use. Many Christian parents have a desire to pass their faith to their children, but they find it intimidating. So in this book we give them a simple yet powerful way to “whet their appetite” for spiritual leadership in their home. Each rite of passage is a path toward an easy “win” in the battle to share our faith. My desire is that it will start to ease parents' fears about creating a spiritual legacy and inspire their creativity so they'll keep at it and not give up.

Burns: *Pass It On* is a road map to help parents develop faith

conversations in the home. It's easy to follow, and the experiences are powerful memories and milestones.

Q: What is a rite of passage, and how does it help a child internalize a truth or lesson?

Burns: It's simply celebrating a milestone in the life of a child and family. Sometimes a rite of passage is very spiritual, and other times a rite of passage is getting a driver's license or learning to tell time. By celebrating rites of passages along the way, it keeps faith present in the basic aspects of life.

Lee: A rite of passage is an invitation to something greater than yourself. It's crucial for all cultures to extend an invitation to things such as family and faith. In my opinion, it's one of the reasons our culture is struggling. The most common rites of passage in our culture are a "sweet 16" birthday party and/or the loss of virginity. Those aren't invitations to something greater than themselves; those are invitations to themselves. When parents invite their kids to faith through rites of passage they are helping their child connect to God's greater story.

Q: Would you describe one of the rites of passages *Pass It On* encourages parents to experience with their kids?

Lee: I think my favorite one is the manhood/womanhood ceremony in the 12th grade. It's actually the one that inspired everything. I was invited by a dad to his son's manhood ceremony. His son was turning 18, and the dad had invited a group of men to come and teach him what a man of God looks like. The dad then asked his son to kneel down as he went to the closet, got a Braveheart sword he had ordered off the Internet and laid it on his son's shoulder. Then he said, "Son, I have friends who are 30 and 40 years old who act like boys because no one ever told them they are men. I'm telling you tonight that based on the authority given to me by God as

your dad, you knelt down as a boy, but you will rise as a man.” Can you imagine what that son must have felt in that moment? He was unleashed into the world with his father’s full blessing and a clear understanding of what a man of God looks like.

Burns: My favorite is the purity code in middle school. Kids are making major decisions that affect the rest of their life at a young age. We now know without a doubt that the more positive, healthy sex education kids receive from home, the less promiscuous they will be. It’s a really cool celebration that gives parents and their kids the opportunity to talk about a really important decision in their life. We ask kids to commit to the purity code, which says, “In honor of God, my family and my future spouse, I commit to sexual purity.” They learn how to:

- Honor God with their bodies
- Renew their minds for good
- Turn their eyes from worthless things
- Guard their hearts

Q: What about families who are getting a late start? Is it too late to build a legacy if your kids are in their teens already?

Lee: It’s never too late. It’s always better to do something rather than nothing. I tell parents to begin right where you are. For some parents you may have to begin with an apology and a promise that your spiritual involvement will increase in your child’s life.

Also we encourage parents to feel free to change the order of the rites of passage or adjust the whole thing as needed for their family. The whole purpose of this book is to inspire parents to lead their children spiritually. If they feel inspired to do something differently or better, then we have done our jobs.

Burns: It's never too late and never too early to begin. *Pass It On* works at any age. Begin the process wherever you want, and grandparents can always lead the way by doing this with their grandkids. {eoa}

For more information about **Jim Burns**, visit or follow him on Facebook (Homeward) and Twitter (@drjimburns). To keep up with **Jeremy Lee**, visit or follow him on Facebook (yojeremylee) and Twitter (@yojeremylee).