

7 Keys to Raising a Godly Child

While today's churches are having stimulating conversations about family ministry, what it is and how to best serve the families in the ever-changing landscape of today's society, there is a "ministry to families" that is happening in the home as well. Family ministry begins in the home. How do parents and grandparents portray the love and grace of Jesus to their children and grandchildren?

How do married couples display commitment and service to one another in the "crazy days" of child-raising? How can children and teens catch a glimpse of the wonder of God's redemptive narrative and find their part in it?

Consider these seven essentials that can turn the routine duties of parenting into a life that has a spiritual, God-centered perspective:

1. Abandon the idea of perfect parenting.

We need to start with ourselves: When we fail, we can simply ask for forgiveness. This models how our children should respond when they make mistakes.

It's important to also set realistic goals and communicate these to our family members. When we live an honest and authentic life before our children, this will nurture a compelling relationship with them in the future.

2. Focus on the heart of your child—not just their behavior.

We need to recognize that there is often something more below the surface of the misbehavior. We can be open to finding that out with God's wisdom. And when handing out the discipline, we can maximize natural consequences (they have the greatest

long-term impact), rather than using shame and guilt to motivate our children toward a certain behavior. Both of these motivators ultimately destroy the soul.

3. Make God central to your lives and conversations.

Worry is an energy zapper and not part of God's plan for our lives.

It is critical to set aside time each day for a few minutes of quiet reflection in God's Word and prayer. When a difficult situation arises, we can choose to ask, in prayer, for wisdom and strength before acting.

Use opportunities to ask your child, "how did you see God today?" This takes the focus off the "lower story" of life and allows each family member to see how God is central to the grand "upper story" of all He is accomplishing in the good and the bad.

4. Talk with (not at) your child everyday.

Looking our children in their eyes when speaking gives them great importance and value. When we listen with generosity to the things that are important to our children, we are building a trust relationship.

It is also important to be aware of what is not being said and to ask questions that will allow our children to share their hearts. In order to do these things effectively, we may need to take time each day away from the interruptions and distractions of media or technology.

5. Be involved with like-minded parents.

Getting involved in a local church gives our children a sense of belonging to a faith community with shared beliefs. We can also intentionally seek ways to meet neighbors with our same values to create play groups or outings. And we need not be afraid to take time for ourselves to have adult conversations,

guilt-free!

6. Bless your child with a strong sense of identity.

Bless children with positive words when identifying them (Examples: "He is a good listener" rather than "He is shy." "She is creative and expressive" rather than "She's not really into sports."). This allows them to see their individual qualities as gifts from God, not burdens to hide or bury.

We can tell our children stories of our family's faith histories and heritage, while sharing our faith journeys—potholes and all!

7. Create opportunities for your child to serve others.

A heart of service begins with allowing our children to be exposed to the needs in our community around us. We can help our children to determine his/her gifts and how he/she might put those into action for the sake of someone else.

While serving, young people often see the world as bigger than their small space of life. They begin to see the storyline that God has been writing throughout all of history, and they are able to find their place in His redemptive narrative in order to come alongside of others to do the same.

Start today to put these things into practice. At the end of the day, you may still feel exhausted as you drop into bed, but you will know that you have invested in what really matters most: passing on faith to your child, with a dependence on His Spirit. Ultimately this is a posture that honors God in our parenting and families.

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