

Basic Building Blocks for Raising Kids Who Are Spiritual Warriors

My heart is breaking as I watch many of my kids' friends walk away from the church and God's Word.

My kids are 23, 21 and 17. Let me say up front they are not perfect, and neither are their parents. However, my kids do still attend church and all frequently spend time in God's Word. They have friends who do the same, but they also have many friends who want nothing to do with the church and have little regard for God's Word.

I can't help but wonder if we're doing all we can together as parents to prevent this.

If your kids are grown and have walked away from the church and God's Word, I would caution you not to allow the enemy to heap guilt on your head regarding what I am about to say. Instead, I would encourage you to keep speaking truth to your kids as the Lord prompts and remember He loves your kids more than you do. He is a faithful pursuer of hearts.

However, for my fellow Christian parents who still have kids in their home, I simply cannot ignore the stirring in my spirit to cry out. Lock arms with each other, hold the line and require your kids to do two things:

1. Read the Bible.
2. Go to church.

But What If?

Some of you are bristling already. The argument is swirling in your minds, *But what if by requiring my kids to do these things, I push them away and cause them to hate God's Word and*

the church? And what about my relationship with them? What do I do when they get mad at me?

We asked ourselves those same questions and heard those arguments from others. But as imperfect parents, we chose to trust God more than we trust ourselves when He says, "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11).

Did God mean for those words to influence our parenting?

Yes, my husband and I believe He did.

But won't our kids turn away from the Bible if we require them to read it or hate the church if we make them go?

Our own children whined and suggested they might turn away from the Word because of our requirement that they read it. They are smart like that. They know how to play on our fears. Yet we counted on God to make His Word a lamp for their feet and a light for their path—just as He said He would in Ps. 119:105.

When other parents allowed their kids to stay at home on Sunday mornings, our kids noticed that, too. We argued and ordered and rode to church with grumpy, sleepy teenagers. Through tears, we trusted that God could soften their hearts and speak to their souls as they fellowshiped with other believers.

We didn't find a clause for teenagers to be omitted from God's instruction in Heb. 10:25: "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching." We took God at His word when He tells us we all need to meet with other believers, and all the more as the world gets harder and harder.

As parents, we believed God and believe our kids need to be in His Word and in His church, just as we do. We knew this was better for them than brushing their teeth. And in the same way we believed they would continue to brush their teeth later in life (even in college) if we required them to do so, we refuted the fear that they would walk away from God's Word and church just because we required them to partake.

It was far from easy. Actually, it was really hard, but our responsibility was great.

Some of the Results

Today, our kids are young adults, and each of them spends time in the Word and goes to church.

Other families in our circle of friends, who required the same of their children, have kids who are still in the Word and still in church as well—and honestly, they are some pretty amazing young people. I recently asked some of them why they still go to church and read the Bible. Here are their responses:

I read the Bible for a lot of reasons, but just a few are getting to have personal time with Jesus and also because spending time in the Word refocuses me on what's important in life and what this whole thing is about. Reading Scripture lets us know where Christians have come from (Jesus), what we need to strive to be like and also where we can go if we follow God relentlessly, holding nothing back. It's not a checklist thing to me anymore—it's a privilege and an honor to be able to come before God and be in His Holy presence whenever we please. I don't worry if my parents or others will ask me if I've read the Word today like I used to. Because to be honest if I haven't, I'm the one missing an opportunity to spend time with a God who loves me and desires to show me what's best for me. I think reading Scripture and diving into it wholeheartedly has brought me closer to God

and led me to love Him more than anything else. –Ben, age 21

I go to church for community. As a believer, and even as a human, I naturally long for community. I notice that it changes how I feel not only emotionally, but also physically. I read the Bible to get to know God. Just as in an earthly relationship, getting to know Him is enjoyable for me. I love reading about His crazy love for me and the amazing stories of what He has done through people. –Isaac, age 18

I read my Bible to know the Lord's heart and to stay close to His heart. It is one of the only ways I can stay constantly encouraged in a world of negativity and disappointment. It is one of the only ways to know truth when surrounded by lies. My life is built around its truths, and if I don't read I am legitimately at risk of forgetting how to live a holy life and at risk of falling out of love with Christ. –Bradleigh, age 23

I'd say the main reason I go [to church] is for the community and relationship side of it that I wouldn't normally get from being outside of the church. I read the Bible out of necessity. Just for fullness. I am honestly not happy when I am not in the Word. –Will, age 23

Throughout my childhood, I looked forward to Sunday mornings to worship God and grow in Him. If I didn't have that, my faith wouldn't be where it is now and for that, I continue to go to church to praise Him and grow in Him. I read my Bible because God continues to guide me throughout Scripture. Whenever I am discouraged or in doubt, it comforts me. Whenever I am happy or when things are going well, I read because I praise God for the good times. Reading my Bible not only benefits my faith, but I believe it is an act of worship. –Jenna, age 17

Hold the Line

You're right—this isn't a scientific study.

Instead, it's a call to encourage and emphatically plead with Christian parents to stick to your guns—even when it's hard. What you are requiring of your kids is a good thing, and it will yield blessing. Yes, there will be difficult moments. Your kids will protest at times, but keep on holding the line. There will be blessing.

This is also a plea for Christian parents to lock arms. Yes, lock arms. Encourage one another to maintain a culture that collectively requires good things of our children. When kids can look to other families who are giving in and giving up on these central good-for-them requirements, it makes it harder on all parents—and ultimately hurts our kids, this generation and the church.

Trust in God who says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Maybe we are losing so many of our kids when they're in college because we didn't join together as parents to create a culture of going to church and reading God's Word. Let's be diligent to hold the line together now while they are still in our homes.

But when we do—when we encourage our kids to worship God through time in His Word and time in church with other believers, the blessing has great impact.

Not only that, when hard times come for our kids (and those times will come), they will be able to stand strong. Two of the young people quoted above were diagnosed with cancer just this year. Yes, cancer. And they are still praising Jesus in their storms.

Isn't this what we want for our kids, the church and our

world?

Allow me to let you in on a little secret about all of those amazing young adults quoted above—none of them has perfect parents. Just ordinary parents who trust God more than they trust themselves and chose to believe God would use His Word and His church for their kids. And He has. And He is.

So friends, keep your kids in the Word and in church and encourage other parents to do the same. They will have a much better chance to grow into adults who love and praise the Lord and love others. They will have a much better chance to find peace, hope and joy to carry them all the days of their lives.

What better thing can you give them? What better thing can you do for our world and our Savior? Lock arms, Christian parents! {eoa}

© 2001-2016 *Revive Our Hearts* God has opened doors for **Kim Jagers** to minister to women as a speaker, writer and ministry leader. Kim loves Jesus with all her heart and has a passion for others to develop a real, run-to-Him relationship and to crave God's Word as she does ... "more than chocolate."

Kim authors an internationally received e-devotional entitled "Single Moment." She has served as a guest blogger for Lifeway's Women Reaching Women. Kim's compelling story has also been featured on Revive our Hearts. She lives and laughs often with her family near Knoxville, Tennessee.