

Intentionally Raising a Godly Generation

Debbie put her faith in Christ at age 11. In fact, her whole family met Jesus at just about the same time.

As her parents began growing in their faith, they nurtured growth in their children as well. Family Bible reading, prayer and talking about God's leading in their lives became a nightly occurrence.

One evening as they were reading Joshua 24, the end of verse 15 seemed to jump off the page! "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." That became the Nelson family declaration. Decades later, all the Nelson children continue to serve Jesus.

So, when Debbie and her husband, Jeff, began a family of their own, they embraced the same declaration. But passing their faith to the next generation was not automatic. It required intentionality.

Shortly before Moses died, he called all of Israel together to remind them of their covenant with God and how to successfully keep it. He instructed them to be diligent in their relationship with God. And, diligent in passing this covenantal relationship on to their children. In Deuteronomy 11:18-21, (NLT), he commends them to, "commit wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you were on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors."

Parenting can be a scary proposition in our world today. The overwhelming narratives in our culture are far from godly. It was much the same in Moses' day. The nations around Israel had a multitude of heinous practices, which is why the Israelites were instructed to share their covenant relationship with God with their children through every aspect of their lives. We must do the same.

Of course, God has given us all free will, so children can still choose to reject Christ. But Proverbs 22:6 promises that if we, "train up a child in the way he should go, ... when he is old he will not depart from it."

So, armed with the promise of God, parents can follow Moses' instruction to teach their children the ways of God with confidence that God will complete the work He begins in each child.

3 Training Tips

Every family and child is unique, so moms and dads must seek the Lord about what will work best for their situation and children. But the need for parents to continually nurture their own relationship with the Lord is essential before any training is truly effective. Without that, all efforts to encourage our children to do so will ring hollow.

As Debbie and Jeff sought the Lord for their family, they were led to do three things:

1. Model an authentic Christian faith daily. Since following Jesus is not just a Sunday activity, they found ways to share their pursuit of Jesus all week long. This impacted the kind of entertainment they allowed in their home; the education decisions they made; their volunteer activities; and more. Their failings were also opportunities to model repentance, humility and grace. And every morning, Jeff gathered the children together before the start of the day to pronounce a blessing over them. Even in their teen years, their kids

sought him out to be blessed before heading out.

2. Pray. Prayer is key in fostering our relationship with the Lord. So, they prayed *for* their children and *with* them. They found that praying scriptures over their children had power. And, Debbie and Jeff taught them to pray over decisions, life issues and the needs of their friends as well. Sharing answers to those prayers built each child's faith and confidence in the goodness of God.

3. Have regular family devotions. Devotions with toddlers looks different than devotions with teenagers, but reading God's Word and praying together were always a part. Debbie and Jeff engaged in discussions of hard topics, too, searching scripture for biblical answers to the cultural trends of the day. Their encouragement to other parents is this: "Even though your children may seem disinterested at times, don't give up or get discouraged. They are seeing, hearing and taking to heart more than you realize."

Now that their kids are adults, they continue to ask the Lord to "fill in the gaps."

No earthly parent is perfect, but we can rely on our perfect Heavenly Father to make all things right!

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