

The 5 P's for Raising a Child in Faith

Your middle school daughter is distraught over being bullied. Before you can respond to her, your 7-year-old innocently asks, "What's ISIS?" as the television blasts the latest atrocities.

Raising children in our uncertain world isn't easy. Raising children to have faith in God is even harder in the current climate. Yet, it is the most important task we as parents will ever undertake.

It has been said that our children are the message we send to the future ... a future we may never see. Here are the Five P's—or Practices—that have helped me raise my children to become stronger, more capable and "faith-full" adults: Those practices are Praise, Purpose, Presence, Perseverance and Perspective, with prayer woven throughout all.

Praise

"The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him" (Exod. 15:2).

We know that God inhabits the praises of His people. Praise is a way of being, an action or response to life situations. Praise is not an emotion, though at times we may feel as though it is. It's a choice. In both good and bad times, we can choose to praise God, just as Paul did when he was in prison. We can seek the good in all things, even if the only good we can see at the moment is how we may inspire others by staying faithful.

Praise influences everything about us: how we respond to hardships, how we interact with others, how we live, love and

even laugh. Praise affects our words and actions. By showing trust in Him and witnessing to others how God is good in all things, we practice a life of praise.

When the car has a flat, praise Him for the fact that you own a car. When the house is a mess, thank God for the roof over your head. When a loved one makes you angry, thank God for the blessings of that relationship.

Praise is not easy. When difficulties come, we tend to resort to moaning and groaning, whining and pining, or fussing and fighting. Yet God doesn't just tell us to praise Him when our world is right, but in all things ... at all times. Still, tough times can bring out the worst in us, when actually, this is the time to praise God most. Why? Because He's in control and His plan for us is greater and better than our short-sightedness.

Purpose

"For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Purpose is simply our reason for being, and as the Scripture points out, our existence is no accident. Nor are our gifts. God has a plan for all, giving each of us a purpose to serve. As parents, we often fail to not only use our gifts for God's purpose, but sometimes fail to help our children discover theirs. We do this for many reasons: fear of going down the wrong path, doubt in our abilities or concern over the cost (emotionally, physically, financially and even time-wise). Yet if we allow God to guide us, we find our purpose. As Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart devises his way, but the Lord directs his steps." The key is to put that purpose to use.

Consider the things you are good at ... these are the things from which we derive our purpose. Look for opportunities to serve in ways that will glorify and spread God's Word. Tell

your children how their specific gifts are from God. Beyond selfish needs, their gifts are meant to serve a greater purpose, beyond themselves and beyond their limitations. It is in this service, God's service, that we feel complete and whole in this life.

Presence

"Remember, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you" (Gen. 28:15).

Presence is the practice of being available for our children. In a world of uncertainty and chaos, our presence provides the stability, reliability and the constancy our children need. Just as God is available to us, it's important for our children to know that our love, support and forgiveness is ever available to them.

As parents, our presence should be comforting to the extent that our children can expect us to show up for the big and small things. For example, during family time, we can choose to be in the moment rather than in our electronics (phone, laptop or iPad). We can direct our children to do the same, teaching them the practice of presence and the importance of investing in each other, rather than letting devices rob us of relationships and time together.

After all, we are their principal influence. Our presence is key in helping our children become their best as we give appropriate counsel, supportive witness and encouraging support. Being present allows us to demonstrate goodwill in everyday situations, offering forgiveness to all and giving hope in dire circumstances. Time with our children serves to empower rather than enable them. Our influence helps shape them into the person God meant them to be. Since children are a gift from the Lord, our presence can be our greatest gift to them.

Perseverance

“For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!” (Ps. 117:2).

Perseverance is enduring trust in God’s plan for us. It is practicing the belief that His steps for us will unfold in His time and for our own good. Perseverance is never giving up on people or situations; it’s a refusal to quit when God has called us.

It’s showing our children that people and God-given goals are not disposable. Just because we fight with a loved one doesn’t mean we discard that relationship. Nor do we throw in the towel because we experience defeat. We model how prayer, hard work and a greater reliance on God—and not just our own abilities—may bridge gaps and keep us moving forward.

Perseverance is not passive. It’s an investment of time, energy and emotions. It’s constantly making deposits into what matters. It’s the practice of believing in and recognizing opportunities God sends our way. Perseverance helps us teach our children not to limit God’s power by limiting our faith.

Perspective

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Perspective is our life’s view. Too often, we sell ourselves short, failing to recognize God’s greatness. Words are powerful and reflect perspective, so let your words as well as your actions be your witness. Remember, no situation is greater than God’s ability to handle it.

Lighten your load by realizing spilled milk is just that. Clean it up (or have your child do it if they are

responsible), and move on. Show your children that worry and anxiety are a waste of energy. Worry robs you of joy, and anxiety depletes energy.

Have I mentioned parenting is hard? Yet, Proverbs 22:6 promises, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Therefore, throughout all of these practices, prayer is the key to staying on track. Our everyday conversations with God allow us to hear His voice in this very challenging process. As you raise your children, remember, it's worth doing well and it's worth doing right. Not just for you, but for your children and their children to come. {eoa}

Dr. Pamela Bradley has additional information on how Praise, Purpose, Presence, Persevere and Perspective can aid a parent in raising a child in Faith in her new book *Holding My Father's Hand: Faith-Based Parenting* available on Amazon and at a bookstore near you. As a mother to five children, grandmother to seven, and one of eight siblings, she has spent her life working with children to make a positive difference. For 30 years, Pam has considered it a privilege to work as a teacher, principal and coach, seeing this as a calling rather than a profession. She and her husband, Charles, reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she now works as an independent consultant, board-certified life coach and now, author.