

Where to Find Help With Building Your Child's Prayer Habits

Your child's spiritual formation will come from good habits that are grounded in the Bible. Children need a spiritual reality that provides them plausible answers to five critical questions:

1. Does God exist? What is He like?
2. How was the world created and formed?
3. What is my purpose and that of humanity?
4. Is there life after death?
5. What is true? How do I live in light of that truth?

Whether your children articulate these questions or not, they are on their hearts and minds. Without solid answers they won't have anchors to draw closer to the Lord. When my daughter Jessica was about five years old, she asked me, "Dad, do caterpillars yawn?" We were driving to the mall, and Jess wanted this question answered. Truthfully I had never thought about this, and frankly I didn't care. But she did. She was really asking, "How was the world created?"

I answered, "Sweetheart, I really don't know if caterpillars yawn." I meant to look it up, but to this day I've still never gotten around to it. But I did answer the question *behind* her question numerous times. She was satisfied with my answer that God created the world. But children grow, and our answers must grow with them, fitting their present maturity level.

Learn the answers. If your child is misbehaving and disrupting the family, don't rush to a quick judgment. The real issue may

be their need for an answer to one of the five basic questions.

In the spiritual formation of your children, the goal is to help them trust their religious practices in spite of challenges that will come against their faith. That's why the Bible encourages parents to "*train up* a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, emphasis added).

Try to learn what your child's needs are. Just as a doctor performs various tests on her patient before offering a prognosis, you must do the same. You do this by spending time together. Good parents know they are not their child's friend. If this line has become blurred in your household, ask the Lord to give you wisdom to re-establish healthy parental boundaries.

If you need help answering the five questions that help your child develop a healthy spiritual life, look to your church. If you don't have a home church, make finding one a top priority. When you become a part of a local church, that community of Christ-followers should provide a wealth of guidance in spiritual things. Your Bible knowledge is sure to grow. Whatever gaps exist on the local church level can be filled with books, websites and other resources.

Your child needs to learn good habits, not simply through conversation but also by what you model. Good habits come easier when you are a part of a community that models those habits. The habits of prayer, Bible study, and connecting with other Christians who are excited about their devotion to Christ will have a positive impact on your life. This in turn will affect your children. A church that supports parents in the process of raising godly kids will prove invaluable.

Sometimes simply providing answers is not enough. You have to give your child space to process the answers. Nine-year-old

Jonathan needed some space and time to make a decision. This is what he said to his parents, Doris and Javier, after a class on water baptism.

Their church offered a two-week water baptism class for kids. At the end, most kids rushed to sign up, but not Jonathan. He opted out. His parents didn't know how to broach the topic with their little guy. They wondered, "What was he thinking? Where was he confused about his relationship with Christ?" Although these questions troubled them, they waited to see if Jonathan would bring up the topic. In a few days he shared, "Water baptism is a big decision, and I have to pray about it first."

Several months passed, and kids' baptism enrollment came up again. This time Jonathan eagerly said, "I want Jesus to be my Savior. I want to be a Christian!" His parents prayed with him, and Jonathan cried as he felt the presence of God envelop him. After this brief prayer time he exclaimed, "I just feel so happy! I'm happy. I'm a Christian." When water baptism rolled around, it had all the more meaning to Jonathan because it was *his* decision.

Focus on the Habit

Bad behavior can be a huge distraction. To stay motivated as you build your child's spiritual life, you need fuel. This means your life cannot be consumed by your child's. This is a very common and serious mistake many parents make. You have to create space and time for your own personal devotions and activities. Maintain a balanced life. These habits will help fill your emotional bank account. This will give you the needed energy and clarity of mind to be effective tackling problems that surface in the home.

When your child grows resentful of spiritual habits you're trying to foster, take a step back and pray. Don't panic. Win the battle on your knees! You cannot force the issue. It must

happen willingly if it's going to stick.

If your child doesn't want to pray, focus on their moral character. For example, encourage them to join a debate club where the students tackle heavy issues. Have videos lying around the house that feature Christian apologists who tackle heavy subjects such as social justice, war or Islam versus Christianity.

The point is this: Spiritual development is not a one-track process. If your child is going through a funky period where he is not open to attending youth groups at church, look for ways to expose him to Christian athletes or some of the nontraditional ministries. This is where a mission trip, domestic or overseas, may prove eye-opening and positive. After some of our teens participated in a mission trip to Haiti and Nicaragua, their lives took a turn for the better. In prayer ask God to give you creative ideas that will help stimulate spiritual growth in your child. Every child is different. What works for one may not work for the other. {eoa}

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