

Researchers Uncover the Biggest Predictor of Lasting Christian Faith

A new study is delivering a message that will encourage Christian families across America: the most powerful influence on whether children keep their faith into adulthood is the home.

Research from the Institute for Family Studies and Communio found that parents play the central role in passing faith to the next generation. The report, titled *Passing the Torch: How Faith Moves Across Generations*, examined adults raised in Christian homes and identified the habits most closely linked to lasting faith.

Researchers found that children whose parents regularly attended church, prayed daily, talked openly about their faith and built strong family relationships were significantly more likely to remain committed Christians as adults.

Church attendance proved especially important. Adults whose parents attended church weekly were more than twice as likely to attend church regularly later in life. Children who attended church with both parents showed even stronger rates of faith retention.



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The study also found that simple spiritual practices at home make a lasting impact. Families who prayed together, said grace before meals and discussed faith several times a week raised children who were more likely to attend church, pray daily and identify as Christian as adults.

Strong family relationships emerged as another key factor.

“Research suggests parent–child relationship quality does not transmit religion by itself, but it creates the relational conditions under which transmission becomes more likely,” the study stated, according to Fox News.

The findings showed that adults who had strong relationships with their parents were more likely to attend church, pray, read Scripture and believe in God. The role of fathers stood out, with strong father-child relationships linked to substantially higher levels of church attendance, prayer and belief later in life.

Healthy marriages also contributed to stronger faith transmission. Children raised in happy, stable homes were more likely to maintain spiritual disciplines as adults, while parents who reported greater marital satisfaction had more faith-centered conversations with their children.

Study authors Jesse Smith, Ph.D., and Jane Lankes Smith, Ph.D., said parents must take an active role in discipling their children.

“In a culture where religion is no longer reinforced by broader society, parents cannot assume faith will simply ‘rub off’ on their children,” the Smiths said, according to Fox News. “The families most successful at passing on faith are the ones who practice it openly, talk about it regularly, and build it into everyday life.”

JP De Gance, founder and president of Communio, said the findings offer hope because many of the factors influencing a child’s faith are within a parent’s control.

“The number of marriages, the health of those marriages, the quality of a parent’s relationship with his children, and the types of conversations we have with our kids are all major factors affecting the future of faith in America,” De Gance

said, according to Fox News. "Here's the good news: many of these factors are within a parents' control. This research shows that the family really is the best small group ever created."

The study points to a simple conclusion: the strongest discipleship program in America is not found in a church building. It is found in Christian parents faithfully living out their faith at home every day.

James Lasher, a seasoned writer and editor at Charisma Media, combines faith and storytelling with a journalism background from Otterbein University and ministry experience in Guatemala and at the LA Dream Center. A Marine Corps and Air Force veteran, he is the author of *The Revelation of Jesus: A Common Man's Commentary* and a contributor to Charisma magazine. For interviews and media inquiries, please contact media@.