

Open Your Child's Windows to God

✖ *Seeing your son or daughter*

choose to follow the Lord is a christian parent's greatest joy. Here's how to help your kids embrace their spiritual journeys.

One

of the most memorable moments for Christian parents is their child's

awakening to faith. What God wants, and what any clear-thinking

Christian parent wants, is for children to come to the place where they

"own" their relationship with God.

Some children take the long

route on their journey of faith and make their commitment to the Lord in

their teen-age years—or later. While this may be nerve-racking to the

Christian parent, not every soul is on the hoped-for evangelical

timetable of "accept the Lord in the preschool years, rededicate or get

baptized in the teen-age years and serve the Lord for life thereafter."

Helping your child own a strong faith in Jesus Christ begins with you,

the parent. You must embrace the journey each child is on and get

comfortable with the fact that you are not in control of this process.

If you do try to control it, you may be ensuring that your

child gets to
his destination the long way.

DEFINING PARENTAL ROLES

What

then is the parent's role in a child's faith development?

There are two

extreme schools of thought. The correct answer is usually in
the

middle. The following examples will help to illustrate my
point.

Arnie's

parents not only were in church every time the doors opened,
but also

believed in keeping up appearances. As long as their four
children were

under their roof, church attendance and "correct Christian
behavior"

were to be observed.

Forget enjoying and loving God. To Arnie's

parents, the Bible was a rule book to be followed, and any
deviation was

met with swift punishment. Predictably, Arnie spent most of
the '60s

and '70s in a drug-induced stupor, never even considering that
there was

a God who could be enjoyed, loved, obeyed and served.

Pam's

family occasionally went to a mainline church where truth was
relative.

God was in nature, but the nature of God wasn't in Jesus; it
was in good

works, social justice and higher education.

You lived faith by

trying to be good and “tolerant” of everything. With no absolute truth,
no need for a Savior and no knowledge of divine intervention, Pam had no
North Star to look to when life started throwing fastballs at her.

Pam’s
brother died of a drug overdose. Her sister became a lesbian. Her first
marriage failed, and her college-aged sons were both kicked out of
school.

With a bottle of pills in one hand and the phone in the other, she called a Christian she knew from work and said:
“You act like
life has meaning. I’ll give you 10 minutes to try to convince me it
does.”

Both Arnie and Pam eventually found their way to the God of the Bible and the Savior from Nazareth. They most assuredly took the
long route.

Perhaps a fallen world, fallen parents, ignorance and willful disconnection from God are reasons some souls must come to the
edge of hell. But I believe that it is never God’s intention for it to
happen this way.

Unfortunately, even “perfect” parents have children who must be snatched away from the enemy at the last moment.

This fact, however, shouldn’t prevent us from doing the right things to

help our children own their faith as they grow. What are the “right things”?

- **Live and model enjoying God.
- **Live and model loving God.
- **Live and model following God.
- **Live and model serving God.

Within

our model of following God is the essential element of helping our child recognize that their relationship with God is their relationship with God. We can't give them our abundant life in Christ, but there is a great chance that if we help them discover how they can serve God with their unique gifts, our children will want to love and follow Him.

A FAITH OF THEIR OWN

Whatever

age your children are, you can help them to realize the grace and forgiveness God has lavished upon them through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. The journey begins with the child's realizing he or she is a sinner.

Some little children understand their need for salvation. But others don't truly get it until they've experienced a bit more of life.

Parents help their children enjoy, love and obey God by giving them the full picture of their own sin and the full

story of

God's grace. Let me illustrate five ways you can do both:

Don't venerate Bible characters except Jesus. Bible heroes were all humans who most definitely weren't perfect.

How

is God's grace shown? By the fact that these people made mistakes but

didn't let their mistakes keep them from following God and doing big

things for Him.

Don't venerate other adults the child looks up to.

Grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles—whoever is close to your

child can seem larger than life and may appear "perfect." In an

appropriate way, talking about the total package or letting the

significant adult talk about their human foibles won't burst your

child's bubble. It will point to God's goodness and grace.

Encourage the other adult leaders your child admires to share their faith stories.

Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, even the senior pastor all need

to be real people who have overcome mistakes by the power of God. Invite

them to your home and have them share their testimonies.

Read and listen to the testimonies of those who have strayed far from God and then realized how much they needed Him.

Read books or Christian magazines; bring people into your home or watch

Christian television to allow your child to hear the faith stories of

those who talk about the effects of sin and the grace of God.

Search for examples of people “learning the hard way.”

I know a couple who took their teen-agers to a local juvenile institution. It doesn't take long in this type of controlled environment to see where a series of poor choices—or even one stupid choice—can lead.

ENCOURAGING EPIPHANIES

Dan, a former church youth leader, understands the importance of a young person's making small but significant steps in his walk with Christ. One young girl named Jennifer who was in his youth group for six years did this.

Although Jennifer came from a stable and loving Christian home, she was the strong-willed type. By age 13, she had pretty much tuned out parental sermons, family devotions and adult church. But because most of her friends were in youth group, she kept within earshot of the Lord.

At church camp, between her eighth- and ninth-grade years, she listened to the testimonies of about a half-dozen high schoolers. In their own words, they admitted their imperfections and their need for the Lord.

Something clicked inside Jennifer's head. If they weren't perfect, I guess I don't have to be

either. The
next summer, she came forward to, as she admitted, “give my
life to
Christ for the first time.”

Two years later she rededicated her
life to Christ. Three years later, she became a camp counselor
for
junior highers. Today, she’s a full-time Youth for Christ
leader,
raising her own funds to disciple other women volunteers and
teen-agers.

From the outside, it seems Jennifer’s parents had nothing to
do
with all these epiphanies, but she admitted differently. “I’m
sure they
prayed for me a bunch, and they always found the money to get
me to
camp. I had to find the Lord on my own timetable and through
my own
discovery. I tested what they said all through high school,
and I found
out something: It was all true.”

Thomas’ parents had to be a
little more proactive. They played into his artistic,
inquisitive nature
by choosing one man in the Bible who was like him. When he was
about 8,
they decided that David would be the biblical character they
would
constantly refer to.

To understand their son and to help him find
his way to God, they first studied David’s life. His ups and
downs and
his words served to help Thomas make his way.

When Thomas got
pushed around on his seventh-grade football team, the lesson
was
“Goliaths will fall when courage and God are on your side.”
When he
started writing poems, his mom read him some of David’s
psalms.

When
Thomas was caught stealing candy with his best friend at a
local
supermarket, Psalm 51 served to show him that true repentance
pleases
God and makes you clean.

Giving Thomas the appropriate thirst for
a “Bible friend” helped him make the transition to Jesus.
Though David
was a hero that was human enough to relate to, Jesus was a
Savior real
enough to trust.

KEEPING SPIRITUAL WINDOWS OPEN

Kids
will not share a faith they’ve borrowed. If they own it, they
will
share it with others. Without this essential step, they won’t
see the
wisdom of obedience or the joy of serving. Here are some ways
to make
sure that once your child’s windows are open to spiritual
things, they
remain open.

Keep the date. Get a Bible and mark
down John 1:12 next to the day and time your child accepted
Christ.
Then tell your child to go to that verse anytime he or she

doubts his or
her salvation.

Throw a party. Go all out for
your children's spiritual birthdays. Buy presents, make a cake
and
invite church friends over. That way every year they can mark
when they
first made the choice to become a Christian.

Give them
permission. Romans 12:12 talks about presenting our bodies to
God as a
living sacrifice. Help your children see that they can
rededicate their
lives to the Lord as often as they feel they need to.

Raise the bar.

Make sure your children are giving God room to do miracles.
Encourage
them to be courageous in prayer and unafraid to ask for
anything. God
will mark their lives with miracles that will undeniably prove
His love
and personal concern.

Growing by doing. Give

your children opportunities to share Christ in actions and
words. As a
family, invite your neighbors for a meal and share the
Christmas story
or show the Jesus film. Brainstorm together for ways to show
God's love
by helping others.

We all know by experience that faith grows in
starts and stops. Mountain peaks and lower-than-low valleys in
spiritual

progress are common.

Times of questioning are not only predictable but also necessary for some. The good news is that eventually, through prayer and persistence, tears and talk, a high percentage of people who grow up in a Christian home do put down the stake that says: "I give up. I'm yours, Lord."

While you're waiting for your child to show signs of a developing spiritual life, remember how God brought you to true ownership of your faith. Thank Him for those who cheered you on spiritually and also prayed for you—even when you were far off. Now, trust God to be as faithful with your children as He was with you.