

Why Some Churches May Be Teaching Kids to Be Fake Christians

Are we raising kids to be fake Christians? Kendy Casey Dean, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, says we may unknowingly be causing children to follow a “mutant” form of Christianity.

Dean says we are raising kids to embrace “moralistic therapeutic deism” which is a watered-down faith that portrays God as a divine therapist whose chief goal is to boost our self-esteem. It says that God simply wants us to feel good and do good.

Dean says this is a big reason why kids abandon churches when they get older. This brand of Christianity simply doesn’t give kids enough to be passionate about. Three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christian, but fewer than half actually live out their faith, only half say it’s important and most can’t explain their beliefs.

Research shows that committed Christian kids share some key traits. Let’s take a look at these and see how we can strengthen these areas of our ministries.

1. A personal story about God they can share. Notice the word “personal.” It has to be their faith. They must go beyond just knowing “about” God to actually knowing God. When kids begin expressing an interest in starting a relationship with Jesus, it is critical that we take the time to explain what that means rather than just hurriedly leading them in a prayer.

How many kids have a fake faith because they were brought forward, said a quick prayer that they didn’t understand, were baptized and told they were “saved?”

One step you can take is to require children to write out their salvation testimony before they are baptized. We do this as part of Starting Line. Starting Line is a class all children must go through with their parents before they are baptized. In the class, we explain what it means to become a follower of Jesus. You can get more information about the class [here](#).

2. A deep connection to a faith community. Notice the word “deep.” Kids whose faith is the real deal have moved beyond casual involvement in a faith community to being deeply connected. How does this happen?

- Consistent attendance.
- Connected to the church as a whole.
- Personally known by caring leaders.
- Part of a small group.

3. A sense of purpose. Kids with authentic faith have moved beyond a “gospel of niceness” and have answered the call to take risks and sacrifice for others. Kids want to be inspired to make a difference. When we challenge them to get up and do something big for the kingdom of God, we will see the yawns replaced by faith on fire.

It’s time we replace our “fun activities” for kids with opportunities to serve and make a difference. You can read [here](#) how we replaced our summer camp with a summer serve program and have seen kids respond and grow spiritually.

4. Parents who have a real faith. Parents are the most important influence on their children’s faith. Kids with an apathetic faith are often the product of parents who have an apathetic faith. Kids must see their parents passionately following Jesus and living out their faith.

Children’s ministries that want to see kids grow up to follow Jesus would be wise to spend just as much time influencing parents as they do children. For too long children’s

ministries have delegated this to adult ministry. It's time we step up and take the lead in investing in parents spiritually and equipping them to lead their children spiritually.

Your turn. Do you think we are raising kids to be fake Christians? Any other reasons why? What do we need to change? Share your thoughts in the comment section below.
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