

PRESERVING THE HARVEST: Keeping Our Children in the Faith—Part Four

By Philip Lancaster

The scriptural mandate that fathers turn their hearts to their children (Malachi 4:6; Luke 1:17) encompasses more than the relational elements we explored in past issues. Passing on the Christian heritage to our children depends on a training process characterized by both a heart-level relationship and Christ-centered content and goals. This is a process we can call Christian discipleship. It is not discipleship if there is a loving relationship without Biblical objectives for belief and conduct. Nor is it discipleship if there are Christ-centered content and goals without a relationship that embodies and reinforces the content. Biblical discipleship encompasses both content and process, both truth and love. While in past articles we focused on the nature of expressed love (“fullness of grace”), here we will begin to focus on the content of godly training (“fullness of truth”).

One reason we may lose our children is through a failure to adequately train them to think and act Biblically.

We must help them to both understand and live the truth that God has revealed in his Word, and that means, first of all, that we must expose them to the Word of God.

Transformed by the Truth

*For as the rain comes down,
and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there, But
water the earth,
And make it bring forth and
bud, That it may give seed to the
sower And bread to the eater,
So shall My word be that goes
forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I
please,
And it shall prosper in the thing
for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*



You and I have no power to make our children into followers of Christ. We can teach, admonish, discipline, and appeal, but we cannot change the heart, and without a heart change none of our children will carry on the faith of their fathers.

Only God himself can shape a person from the inside out. Only he can change the heart. This does not make our efforts to train our children irrelevant. Quite the contrary. The God who can transform a child into his image is the same God who has revealed the normal means by which he accomplishes that transformation, and one of the primary means he uses is instruction in his Word. His Word has the power to transform.

Scripture is replete with statements that confirm this fact. The passage above from Isaiah plainly states that God’s Word will bring forth fruit just as surely as the rain brings forth produce from the ground. His Word is not just a collection of inert words and sentences. “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12) God’s Word is the very instrument by which a person is born again (1 Peter 1:23). It is the means by which a person grows up to spiritual maturity in Christ, the process called sanctification (John 17:17). The Word of God is the tool that God uses to transform the mind and the life: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and

perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Surely then, exposing our children to the Word of God is the most important element of training them, and a failure here can have devastating consequences. So how does this exposure happen? The key passage concerning the discipling of children pictures a process in which they encounter God’s Word everywhere they go during all their waking hours. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Exposing Children to God’s Word

Let’s list some of the ways this exposure to God’s truth can occur.

1. Family worship. The regular practice of gathering the family to hear the Bible read is perhaps the most important method of teaching children the Scriptures. This is the normal setting for the primary Bible instruction of a child. Over the years this family time can be used for the simple reading of a passage without teaching or discussion, for detailed and systematic teaching, or for casual discussions of content and application. Through all these means the truth takes root in the mind and heart of the child.

2. Personal devotions. Each child should be trained to have a daily time of personal worship or devotions (often called the Quiet Time)

in which he both prays and reads Scripture. As he is taught to read the Bible expectantly, it comes alive for him with answers to his own questions about doctrine and life. This spiritual discipline is a key way in which a child makes the faith of his parents his own.

3. Church meetings. God intends every Christian to be under the weekly teaching ministry of the elders of a local church. Their teaching will reinforce what a child is learning at home and provide a supportive backdrop for the Biblical view of life that a father teaches his family.

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4. Scripture memory. Given the power of the Word to transform, parents ought to take advantage of every available means to get the Word of God to lodge in the heart of the child. One very useful means of doing that is encouraging the memorization of Scripture. As the Word takes root in the mind, it is available to shape the heart. (cf. Psalm 119:11)

5. Bible-based education. The truth of the Bible needs to shine on every endeavor of our children, especially the school subjects which

occupy such a large part of their childhood attention. The books and teachers to which they are exposed should present a Biblical view of whatever subject they are studying.

6. Conferences, seminars, tapes and videos. We live in a day in which there is a wealth of good Bible teaching available through these means. It is a shame not to take advantage of these opportunities to expose our children to many teachers they might not otherwise encounter in the normal spheres of family and church life.

Neglect of any of these means of exposing our children to God’s word leaves them, to that extent, less likely to become godly adults as they mature. For example, the father who fails to conduct regular family worship and fails to train his sons and daughters to meet the Lord personally in daily devotions need look no further for an explanation when it turns out that one of

his children does not embrace his Christian faith and values when he reaches adulthood. Using the Bob Jones curriculum and attending a good evangelical church may not make up for the failure to make the Bible a regular part of family and personal life.

The author is the editor of *Patriarch* magazine, a publication for Christian men, which is available for \$25 a year from Patriarch, PO Box 50, Willis, VA 24380. Or sign up online at www.patriarch.com.