

Proverbs 3:1-4; 6:20-23; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 14-17

“Raising Spiritual Giants: Beyond Table Grace and Bed-time Prayers”

I have noticed, from time to time, that people who are converted later in life – and I’m talking about adults or young adults who surrender to Jesus Christ, inviting Him into their hearts and living into a new relationship with Him – these adult conversions that come from out of a life-crisis show more power, more passion, or more genuine *change* ...than what we find in some adults who were raised in the Church and live with Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Some observers who look across the landscape of believers who were raised in the Church ...wonder, “Where’s the faith? Where’s the love?” Those who grow up “good” – may not know how *badly* they need mercy and forgiveness from God! Some who grow up in the Church seem forever disinterested and uninvolved.

But there are some Christian families that do very well! So that some families across the great Church raise spiritual giants – who love the Lord and serve the Lord in marvelous ways!

So how can our families raise children who understand what it means to trust God – when experiences in life leave our children disappointed? How can we raise children whose hearts are sensitive to the will of God for their lives? How can we help our children find real “success” through worship and through faith and love for God?

We’re going to explore some answers for that kind of question today. Effective families don’t just happen. It’s the result of deliberate, intentional planning. Godly mothers and fathers think multi-generationally. Godly parents don’t look simply at the moment in time today, but they see their children for the people they will become; they see the mound of clay God desires to mold and fill and use. Godly parents look ahead to the future and see the adult and parents their children will become, and they have the courage and wisdom to change their calendars and their vocabularies and the way they respond to disappointment – in order to love their children with grace and to influence their children with faith.

We live in a culture of confusion and chaos. It was into that kind of landscape Moses was leading God’s people ...as they prepared to enter the promised land, after coming from out of Egypt and forty years of wandering. God wanted to reinforce the teachings of faith with His people, and remind them about their relationship with this God who loved them – for the culture into which they were moving would not be kind to their God.

So we have this great instruction from God, through Moses: **“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.”**

We are raising our children in the same circumstances, where God is mocked or ignored. So we must reinforce right thinking and truth in a land of agnostics and secular philosophies. Your children will be able to balance faith with science if they know *you* believe – and they hear how *you* trust in God!

I was able to balance the “contradictions” of science and faith at a state university when the science professor challenged his freshman class: “I don’t want to hear how God created the universe. That’s an ‘F’!” So I learned the secular theories – but held privately to my relationship with God, thinking, “Maybe the earth is 40 billion years old! Maybe it’s not. Maybe animals evolved from one group to another – maybe they didn’t. Maybe we can explain the geo-physics of the earth without God. But I believe there is a God – because He just changed my heart!”

Even when I'm confronted by arguments for the other side, when teachers with their own agenda ridicule the Christian faith – I still *hope* there is a God! And there's not much out there that can destroy my hope!

Listen: There's a time to teach! Listen for the word "when." "Repeat the commands (or the lessons) again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again."

When should you be teaching your children? Whether resting or working, formally instructing or casually relating, whether you are fishing or hunting or driving or watching television, truth is to be deposited into the lives of our children. I believe God will protect and use that teaching and truth years from now to secure the souls of your children!

So we're talking about family spirituality and devotions beyond table grace and bed-time prayers. Specifically, we're going to name five teaching strategies in order to raise spiritual giants.

1. Teach the Bible – We read the passage today from 2 Timothy: **All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.**

Home is one place the Church can gather together. In fact, the family is the first small discipleship group. Home bible studies are not new. So I want to encourage you to make a plan to get into God's word. The Bible brings clarity with object lessons and practical teaching. You can teach your children biblical truths – and help them apply those teaching principles to their lives, when the occasions arise. You can find books at the local Christian bookstore for family devotions. Invite your children to memorize bible verses and celebrate their memory work! Worship together at home or while camping. Whisper to them verses that are meaningful to you. Sing Christian songs together. And bring them into the presence of God to pray. Teach the Bible in formal, structured settings.

2. Spend Time with Your Children – A young, successful attorney said, "The greatest gift I ever received was a gift I got one Christmas when my dad gave me a small box. Inside was a note saying, 'Son, this year I will give you 365 hours, an hour every day after dinner. It's yours. We'll talk about what you want to talk about, we'll go where you want to go, play what you want to play. It will be your hour!'"

"My dad not only kept his promise," the lawyer said, "but every year he renewed it – and it's the greatest gift I ever had in my life. I am the result of his time."

Spend time with your children. Ask them, What is your greatest fear right now? What do you worry about? What do you need more of from Mom or Dad? What makes you really angry? What causes you to be really sad? What are your greatest dreams and your greatest joys?

You know, they just want you to ask! They are eager to tell you about themselves!

3. Take Advantage of those Informal, Spontaneous Teaching Moments – You don't have to look any further than today's current events to help your children think through spiritual questions. Talk about where we find God through the daily curriculum of news reports, headlines, global events, and personal tragedies around us. We can encourage our children to trust God – as you learn to trust Him together ...with those about whom we've read in the pages of our Bibles!

There are just some moments that are obvious teaching points, and wise parents know when to offer simple instruction or counsel.

In a small airport a mother and her young daughter were awaiting to board a plane when

they noticed a middle-aged couple in animated conversation. As they chatted, the man pulled his hands from his pockets to gesture and a dime slipped out and bounced on the floor, rolling near his feet.

Neither the man nor his wife noticed, but the little girl and her mother did. The girl made a move for the dime, but the mother grabbed her arm. “I want that dime, Mommy,” she whispered. What an opportunity to teach this child ethics, fairness, and courtesy!

“I know,” her mother said, giggling. “Wait till they walk away.”

“He doesn’t see it!” the girl said, fighting to break free.

“Just wait, honey. As soon as he leaves you can have it.”

When the older couple began to move away, another observer, taking in the whole scene, picked up the dime, “Excuse me, sir. You dropped this.”

The man looked surprised, “Hey, thanks a lot!” The observer wrote, “A dime might seem insignificant, but I grieved for that child and the values she was learning...” (*What Makes a Man?*; Bill McCartney; pg. 102)

What we teach in family devotions won’t mean much if our lives don’t match what we say. How many times have we told a child to stand on their toes in order to get on the amusement park ride that would only seat those who measured up to the mark? And who’s been tempted to say of their child, “She’s only four,” when they were actually six – because of a \$3 dinner discount for those under the age of 5? How well are you teaching honesty, integrity, and respect for rules and authority?

4. Service and Servanthood – Perhaps the most important, and most overlooked devotional exercise you can employ as a family is serving.

God wants us to love, serve and care for others – unconditionally and completely – just as He does. When we do love, serve and care for others – for our spouse, our children, our parents and friends and family and strangers – we’re fulfilling God’s plan for community and relationships.

One mother wrote: A few nights ago, I read my three kids a bedtime story about a missionary who spent 30 years of his life serving in Nepal. I realized it wasn’t much of a lull-them-to-sleep story, as I fielded eager questions with excited interest.¹

How will God use my children to build His kingdom? I wondered. Will they serve Him overseas, immersed in a foreign culture? Will they remain in North America, shining as lights in a secular workplace? Whatever their futures hold, how can I help mold them into world changers?

As I pondered the latter question, one thought came swift and clear: Teach them to think beyond themselves and their own needs. World changers follow the example of Christ. They practice kindness and are willing to sacrifice convenience and comfort for other people’s sake.

Now, you don’t have to go to the ends of the earth to serve. You can find opportunities to serve for your family not far from home. This same mother wrote:

- When missionary families on furlough stayed with us, our kids shared their bedrooms with the children.
- We provided transportation to Sunday school and midweek kids’ club for children who wanted to attend but whose parents couldn’t take them.
- We invited friends to invade our lakefront home on scorching summer days.
- We delivered meals and drove one pregnant woman’s children to school when she was

¹ Grace Fox, this article first appeared in the April, 2005 issue of *Discovery Years*

- ordered to bed rest.
- When a friend's husband left her, we invited her family in for dinners and table games.

Serving others helped our kids see beyond themselves. But we can do something more:

5. Prayer – We can pray for our children's spiritual well being. So how do we get beyond that simple prayer: "Lord, bless my kids; keep them safe"? Do your prayers seem limited or shallow?

Things improve when we pray from God's Word. Use specific scriptures to shape your prayers. If you want your children to live like Christ, Philippians 2 can guide you: "God, teach our children to humbly consider others better than themselves. May they look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Ask the Lord to bless your kids, not necessarily with wealth or fame or an easy life, but that through them, His way will be known on Earth and His salvation among all nations (Psalm 67:1-2).

INVITATION

Are you looking for ways where God can use you and your family to care for the needs of others? Ask God to open your eyes to ways you can serve Him together, with your children.

Families become strong, because parents pay the price to be different, because they introduce biblical truth into everyday life.

If you don't already have a regular family worship time, sit down with your partner and decide when would be the best time for your family.

Structure your family devotions with the ages of your children in mind...