

Parenting in a Contrary Culture

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Every day our children receive an endless stream of visual, verbal and digital information that is constantly teaching them how and what to think! They are being bombarded daily by advertising campaigns, political movements, ethical issues and teaching strategies that, in large part, attack, undermine and redefine the values taught by Christian parents.

There is no doubt that, in these last days, the wisdom of God is being challenged by those who say that *'evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter'* (Isaiah 5:20), and so as parents raising the next generation of Kingdom-building children, our task is great and the dedication that is required is substantial.

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My two older children, Holly and Conor, are awake for approximately 98 hours a week, of which 35 are spent at school and perhaps another 10 in the company of their friends. That means that, as a parent, I have less than 50% of their waking hours to contend for truth. Considering my own responsibilities as a pastor and husband, that time diminishes significantly, leaving only a small window of opportunity if I am to bring my children through in health as followers of Jesus.

Parenting God-focused Children

So how do we do it? What are the key principles that will provide our children with the best possible home environment in which to flourish and develop minds focused on the Kingdom of God?

Apply the Deuteronomy Principle

'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.' (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

I have discovered that no matter what I say to my children, they catch who they see I am, not who I say I am. That is why we are commanded to love God with all that we are, and then in turn to teach our children His ways. The way we live before them will determine the way they live after us.

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Children, more often than not, value their parents' values. A father who loves cars and speed will usually produce a "petrol-head" son! If our priorities do not reflect a biblical, Jesus-centred, Jesus-first lifestyle, then the chances are that our children will battle to obey a parent who instructs a child to get out of bed and go to church on Sunday mornings, without at least a degree of rebellion or lack of desire to be in God's house.

The Deuteronomy principle encourages us to make our homes an environment where conversation constantly orbits around Jesus. Rather than cocooning our children from life's challenges, we must demonstrate how Jesus leads us, even through troubled waters.

Children do not need to be protectively bubble-wrapped from our season of financial shortfall. Instead, sit with them, explain the family need, teach them to pray for provision and celebrate when God miraculously furnishes you with what you need.

Talk endlessly of the goodness of Jesus, share testimony regularly. When a family member falls ill, instead of paracetamol, pray! Rather than cough medicine, anoint the one who is sick with oil.

To raise a generation of Kingdom-minded children, we must expose them to the Kingdom and the authority of Jesus in our lives.

Nurture Self-feeders

'We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done ... then they would put their trust in God' (Psalm 78:4,7)

All the days of our lives we will bear the responsibility of teaching following generations about the wonderful things Jesus has done. At some point, however, our children must transition from spoon-feeding to self-feeding.

We read Bible stories to our youngest, Skye (4), we pray with her, teach her how to worship and listen for God's voice, but if she never learns to discover these truths for herself, she may never progress beyond spiritual milk.

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Every day our older children live by the 3 B's. Bible, Breakfast, Brush (teeth - we have given up on hair!). Each morning we ask, 'What did you read, what did it mean, how does it change your life for today?'

For months I wondered, 'Will they ever do this by themselves without continual nagging or constant reminding?' Then something began to shift, they began to self-feed. Before even being asked "What did you read?" we were hearing all about it before breakfast. Not only did the habit change,

their behaviours soon followed after. His Word never returns void.

So far we have discussed some of the practical ingredients that will give our children the fundamental principles of following Jesus, but we need the yeast to breathe life into them.

Teach Children to Walk by The Spirit

'Repent, and each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself'. (Acts 2:38-39)

During Peter's first sermon immediately following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he made great effort to stress that the Holy Spirit had not come to relate to adults alone. He quoted the prophet Joel, reminding the people that their sons and daughters would prophesy and their young men would see visions.

I frequently meet parents who are committed to teaching their children stories from God's Word but who fear teaching them to listen to God's voice, or to prophesy. Children are often deeply sensitive to the Lord's voice, often they are more expectant to hear than adults. Consider Samuel, he heard the Lord speak to him even before he knew the Lord (1 Samuel 3:7).

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As a family, we regularly spend time together praying and prophesying. Our children have at times brought the most profound revelation, even on one occasion revealing that the Lord would place £500 in our letterbox by the end of a specific month! On the 31st of the month, lo and behold, an envelope with a £500 gift arrived in our letterbox! I cannot overstate the faith that events like that stimulate, but if we never make space for such miraculous moments, we will rob our children of the faith the Holy Spirit nurtures in us.

We have a short window of opportunity to raise our children up in the ways of the Lord. Over time, particularly in the teenage years, the influence of the parental voice quietens as it competes with the influence of school friends and cultural changes. When the sad day arrives for them to spread their wings and fly the nest, we need to know that we have sown faithfully into the next generation, raising young people who walk, talk and breathe Jesus. That they, in turn, will tell their children, even the children yet to be born (Psalm 78:6).

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