

Teaching Our Children

2 Timothy 3:10-17; Luke 11:1-13

Last week we looked at the role God gives parents. Ephesians 6:4 says, *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Parents are to bring their children up *in the training and instruction of the Lord*. They have a God given task to fulfil to teach their children about God and his ways.

Deuteronomy 6 says, ⁶ *These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.* ⁷ *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* (6:6-7) This talks about “on the road” teaching, *when you sit at home and when you walk along the road*, relating daily decisions and things we do and see to God and his will.

But there is also the need for a set time to read the Bible and pray with our children, often this can be before bed or at a meal.

INTERVIEWS

As we can see it isn’t always easy. Life gets busy. Things go wrong. But if we are to teach our children we need to make it a priority. It is important if we find it lapses to get back to it.

1. Bible Reading

Paul writes to Timothy, ¹⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,* ¹⁵ *and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy 3:14-15) Timothy was faithfully brought up by his mother and grandmother (1:5) *From infancy* (from a very young age) he has known the scriptures. They have read the Bible to him and taught him to read it.

Paul goes on to show why the Bible is so important. ¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Bible will equip our children to live God’s way and to serve him.

What’s for dinner tonight? We try to give our children a balanced diet. We spend a lot of time preparing food for them. We give them a balanced diet so they’ll be healthy and strong. I hope you don’t take them to Maccas every day. And we make sure they go to school so they will be equipped for a life of meaningful work.

But we need to equip them spiritually also. They need to be spiritually healthy and equipped to serve God. They need a regular diet of God’s word. (So do we!)

It is good to build this teaching time into the routines of day just as you do with meals, school, cleaning teeth, bedtime and other important activities. Routines mean you don't have to decide will we do it today or won't we.

How do feed them God's word?

Look at the sheet. (attached at the end of this sermon) It gives the stages of a child's development. (Of course this doesn't come from the Bible. It is the result of research.) It is important to understand what is needed at each stage. In the right hand column are age appropriate Bible materials are recommended.

At first where parents provide love, and consistent care a child learns to trust. If her parents reliably provide love, security, and care it lays the foundation for a later trust in a personal God, trusting God as a loving, dependable Father. It's as if the parent is God to their infant child.

As they get older they still need this care to develop trust but they start to learn through stories. They can't think in abstract ideas till later so teaching theology in adult terms won't make any sense, concepts such as sin, justification and salvation. But stories particularly about Jesus are important. Many Old Testament stories contain ideas that are beyond them. It can be helpful to introduce children to these stories but they won't really understand the meaning till they are older.

A story Bible with good pictures is the place to start or small illustrated Bible story booklets such as the *Lost Sheep* series. Look at the display in church and order one or go to a Christian bookshop such as Koorong Books.

As they get older they will start to understand that some things are real and some are fiction. They will reject Santa and the Easter Bunny. They have to work out if the Bible and miracles are true. It is important to think of what stage they are at and provide the right help and teaching for that stage. Be ready to answer questions. It's OK to say you don't know. But then find out.

Eventually they will need to be reading the Bible for themselves. There are online Bible reading plans they can follow. Continue to encourage them.

My Mum used to read the Bible to me when I was little. I can remember my brother and I sitting in bed as my Mum read to us. So when I became interested in God at about 13 I realised that I needed to start reading the Bible for myself. It was natural to start doing it myself. It's a great start to give your children.

2. Prayer

What do you think it was like for Jesus' disciples? They travelled around with Jesus (Picture it!) They saw his miracles, heard his teaching, saw crowds gathered and saw other people start to follow Jesus.

But they also saw his private life. They knew he spent time with his heavenly Father in prayer. At times he got up way before dawn to pray. At other times he went up on a

mountain by himself. They knew he prayed and that it was something very special for him. Even Jesus as Son of God needed to pray to his Father. They wanted to pray too but weren't sure how.

In Luke 11 we read, *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."* (11:1) Jesus then teaches them the Lord's Prayer. He teaches the sort of things that God wants us to pray for. We naturally pray for things we want but the Bible teaches that there are other things we should pray for as well. We need to teach our children what to pray for.

Jesus goes on to teach them to pray trusting God. ¹¹ *"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11:11-13) He teaches them that God is a personal Father to be trusted.

He also teaches them God's promises about prayer. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* (11:9)

So the disciples had Jesus' example. He prayed regularly and they had his instruction, what to pray for and how. We need to do them same for our children. Teach them to use their own words, don't need special words. Teach them not just to pray for things they want, to pray for others also. Encourage them to trust God. Remind them of answers to prayer.

We can pray with our children when we read the Bible and also at meals. Remember to say grace, acknowledging that all we have comes from God. Pray for safety when you travel. Pray in times of other need.

It is really important to make time for Bible and prayer.

3. Conversion?

We all want our children to be saved. We want them to go to heaven. What do we have to do to get them saved?

Firstly the Bible doesn't say much about children coming to faith. It only talks about adult conversions. It talks about adult concepts of faith and commitment. What the Bible does say is that God works in families. The covenant was made with Abraham and his children. The Philippian jailor and his household were baptised (Acts 16:33).

We see Jesus' attitude to the children of believers.

¹³ *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* (Mark 10:13-14) Jesus says the kingdom of God belongs to these children. They are children of God.

Children have a developing understanding of faith and salvation. They don't have an adult understanding. Certainly they can have a childlike trust in Jesus. We need to treat them as God's children, not treat them as little pagans until they made a commitment. Tell them they can talk to God as a Father and that he will hear them. Teach them that God loves them.

We have to be careful not to put pressure on them to pray a prayer of conversion, to make a commitment. They may well do these things because want to please us not because they understand what they are doing. Certainly we need to teach them to trust Jesus but not to say a prayer that is some defining moment in their life in a adult way.

How does all this seem? Too much? Just think what is the next step. Buy a Bible? Plan a time to read? Don't panic. Do what you can but make a start.

	Life Focus	Developmental Question	How to foster faith	Bible Stories Roughly in age order
Baby	Basic Needs Food, Warmth, Love, Care	Can I trust the world?	Parents Provide Love, Holding, Safety, Care	The Beginner's Bible The Lost Sheep Series The Jesus Storybook Bible The Gospel Story Bible CEV Bible of their own Study Bible
Toddler	Learning how to do things, developing independence, Literal thinking	Is it OK to be me?	Praise, Stories – especially about Jesus, Choices, Play	
Pre-school	Imagination, Questions, Exploring	What is it OK to do?	Routines, More stories, Encouragement to explore	
Primary School	Concrete thinking, Empathy, Justice	Can I make it in the world?	Balance pressure to succeed with valuing them as themselves, Christians outside the family, More stories	
High School	More abstract thinking, Looking for role models, Reality testing	Who am I? Who can I be?	Personal Bible study, Life stories, Theological concepts, Christian peers	
Young Adult	Making their way in the world	Can I make my life count?	Christian community, Personal Bible study	

Theoretical background: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, Faith Development theories by Westerhoff & Stephens. These theories have been developed in a Western (largely American) context.