

INSTRUCTING YOUR CHILDREN

JOHN ANGELL JAMES - "The chief end of every Christian parent must be the spiritual interests, the religious character, the eternal salvation of his children."

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

“Wise for salvation” doesn’t simply mean to get them saved but to train them in all they need to know as a disciple of Jesus that they may be “competent, equipped for every good work.”

I. WHY TEACH?

A. The Mandate To Instruct

Deuteronomy 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your children

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers...bring them up in the...instruction of the Lord.

Parents are primarily responsible for instructing their children. Both of these key commands are directed to parents. There is only so much that you might delegate and there is no area that you can abdicate.

Instruction is to be purposeful. We can't afford to think that this will just happen. In Deuteronomy we are told to actively "impress" certain things upon our children and to do so with diligence.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN - "It is well that we remember that the fathers were principally responsible for the giving of this religious instruction. Sometimes it seems as though Christian people have lost something of this ideal, and especially Christian fathers. There is a great tendency to trust the religious teaching of our children to others than ourselves, such as preachers, Sunday-school teachers, and those who specialize in that work in one form or another. For the work of all such we cannot be too thankful; but we ought to remember that the first responsibility for the diligent teaching of the children belongs to those to whom they are entrusted as the most sacred and blessed gift of God. The teaching of the things of God by fathers and mothers has a value and a virtue which can be supplied by none other."

II. WHAT TO TEACH

A. The Gospel

WILLIAM FARLEY (*Gospel Powered Parenting*, 42) – “Saving faith, deeply rooted in the children’s hearts, is the supreme goal of Christian parents.”

1. Present the gospel

General training of our children prepares their hearts for the gospel. That general training, however, won't convert our children. Only the gospel is the power of God for salvation. We must preach the gospel early and often. In making it understandable to our children (they will not understand in the same way as an adult) we must be careful to make it the gospel - there is not one way to enter for kids and another for adults.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 76) – “You must always hold out to your children both their need for Christ’s invasive redemptive work and their obligation to repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ.”

There is a faith and humility in children that makes them more naturally softened to the gospel. Childhood is an ideal time to lead someone into a relationship with the Lord.

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Teaching the gospel includes teaching on:

- Sin – what it is, that they are sinners by nature and deed, unwilling and unable to repent, unable to save themselves, slaves to sin.
- The Law – God commands help them to see what is expected of them but also that they are powerless to obey. The good effect is they can find hope only in Jesus.

Galatians 3:24 (NIV) So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith

A child can't ever be allowed to think his or her “goodness” or obedience satisfies God. Obedience is good and to be commended but it doesn't save.

- Holiness and wrath – that God takes sin seriously.

- The gospel itself – what happened and why it was important; the love, grace and mercy of God that underlie the gospel.
- The proper response to the gospel – repentance and faith.
- The effects of the gospel – justification, reconciliation, glorification/heaven.
- The “behind the scenes” working of God – election, regeneration

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. (*Successful Christian Parenting*, 47) – “One of the worst things parents can do is be intimidated into thinking someone else would make a better evangelist for their child, thus abdicating their most crucial responsibility, missing the best opportunities for reaching their children, and forfeiting the best blessings of parenthood...Think of leading your children to Christ as a long-term assignment – the most important duty God has given you as a parent.”

2. Trust the Lord

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

The doctrine of divine election can cause either great comfort or great anxiety to parents. I take great comfort in it because I know that, while I have no guarantees, I do have great reason for hope because of my covenantal relationship with God. At the same time, there is the paradox of election/personal responsibility. Each child must come to faith in Christ: a parent’s faith cannot convert him or her.

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

3. Be patient

Don't press your child into a commitment he either doesn't understand or doesn't really want to make from the heart. Our goal is not to get our children to pray a prayer that will ease our anxiety but to come to genuine faith and repentance. Parents with otherwise good judgment can have that judgment clouded by affection and hopes. The genuineness of a child’s conversion will be important in his or her future discipleship.

- We can mistake natural curiosity for a prepared heart.
- We can mistake intellectual knowledge for heart commitment.
- We can mistake wanting to be part of the crowd (my friends, siblings) for personal devotion.

- We can mistake learned behavior that is Christian-like for a life changing relationship.

4. How do you know they are ready?

- Increased initiative on their part - they are pressing you.
- Increased questioning on their part
- Increased understanding of their need for forgiveness
- An understanding of the gospel that they can explain in their own words
- Whether your children are ready or not, affirm every bit of interest they show. Don't be discouraged by their ups and downs. They will probably experience times of interest and apathy. Maintain your faith.

5. Caring for the fruit

Praying a prayer isn't the end of gospel instruction, it is only the beginning. You also have a vital part to play in the discipleship/sanctification process.

Continue to talk about your child's conversion experience. Reinforce it. Make sure he or she still understands it. Help them to go from childlike faith to adult faith (faith that is more informed, yet still faith).

However, be careful about premature assurance. Are they starting to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance"? Is there a maturing understanding of what it means to commit themselves to Christ? Is there a growing (and independent) passion for Him? Do you see evidences of grace in their character? Are they more easily and frequently convicted of sin? Are they worldly? Is there a desire to please God? Is there a sincere love for Jesus?

Parents must walk the fine and difficult line between "now you are saved" and "well, I don't really know." My recommended approach – treat them like they are saved without overly assuring, meanwhile, keep an eye on the fruit of their life over the long haul. I think the best time to question and/or challenge a young child's profession of faith is when they are 16-18 years old and are exercising more freedom and choice than ever before.

The Scriptures are clear that if your child is genuinely saved the effect will be apparent in his life. You can't have the Holy Spirit come to indwell and remain unchanged. Behavior (what they say and do) and values (what they care most deeply about) start to change. Parents are often too willing to settle for fleeting changes and flimsy evidence because we want to be assured of our child's salvation. ("whew, that's done!") The question is too important for that. If there isn't solid evidence of a changed heart, you need to do some more work.

B. God

Next to the gospel, the doctrine of God is the most important thing we teach. The two things that most build passion in believers are God and the gospel. The only fruitful long-term motive for obedience is love for God/Jesus. Parenting moves from getting children under control to developing their character to seeing them exhibit self-motivated obedience because they love Him.

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

ED MOLL and TIM CHESTER (*Gospel-Centered Family*, 20) – “Our job is not to pressure our children into a life of begrudged duty. Our role is to extol the surpassing greatness of Christ. We’re to extol Christ so much that everything else feels like rubbish in comparison.”

1. What He is like

A.W. TOZER (*The Knowledge of the Holy*) – “What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

- His nature and character
- His deeds – creation, providence, redemption
- His commands

2. Our duties to Him

WILLEM VanGEMEREN (*Expositors/Psalms*, 113) – “The dignity of man is a gift of God and requires a relationship of responsibility as well as a response of praise to the good creator.”

- To Glorify Him – to represent him rightly: to live for him not for self: to please him: to define success biblically not as the world defines it.
- To Love Him
- To Worship Him
- To Fear Him
- To Obey Him

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 66) – “From their earliest days they must be taught that they are creatures made in the image of God—made for God. They must learn that they will only ‘find themselves’ as they find Him. Your child must grow to see that real living is experienced when he stands before God and says ‘Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you (Psalm 73:25).”

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. (*Successful Christian Parenting*, 79) – “You have not satisfied the responsibilities of parenthood when you have made your child submit to you. If you are consistent and firm in your discipline, our child may obey you because he or she fears violating your standards. That is a fairly easy thing to achieve, but it is not the proper goal of biblical parenting. Your child should fear violating God’s standard, not merely yours. You are only an intermediary with the responsibility of teaching your child to fear God. If your children grow up fearing only your displeasure but not God’s, what will they do when you are not there?”

C. The Scriptures

What they teach in whole, in part and by topic and how to apply/relate them to one’s life. Without having to say so, you are teaching your children to value the authority and sufficiency of scripture for all they need in life.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. - “God breathed Scripture provides for us the comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary to live as our heavenly Father desires for us to live. The wisdom and guidance for fulfilling everything He commands us to believe, think, say, and do is found in His inerrant, authoritative, comprehensive, and completed Word.”

D. The Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are the primary means of grace whereby your children may grow in their knowledge (both rational and experiential) of God.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

- Prayer
- Bible reading
- Scripture memorization

- Worship

E. How To Battle Sin

Ephesians 4:20-24 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- Love good and hate evil
- Identify, avoid and resist temptation
- Identify the sinful fruits and roots of sin – to be properly self suspicious
- Identify the godly fruits and roots of virtue
- Appropriate grace to change
- The power of confession and accountability

F. To Love the Church

Other than the gospel itself, the most critical factor in your children's spiritual walk will be their commitment to a local church.

JOHN STOTT - "If the church is central to God's purpose, as seen in both history and the gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center?"

Teach them about commitment, service, community life, giving, and evangelism.

H. How To Relate with People

Mark 12:29-31 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Much of this can happen at home as they learn how to treat their siblings and friends.

This will include things like:

- Humility – consider others better than self
- Respect – for adults, for others, for property
- Consideration
- Loyalty – gossip and slander (Mary is so stupid...)
- Servanthood – when friends come over for fun or to serve
- Communication - greeting, talking to adults, etc.
- Conflict resolution – including forgiveness
- Relating to those in authority
- Relating to the opposite sex
- Relating to those less fortunate.

We must also teach them the vital importance of care in choosing their companions.

Proverbs 13:20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

One of the great challenges in this area is how to protect your children from the world while still training them for their mission as disciples to engage the world with the gospel.

A Note on Abuse: It is sad to say but child abuse is a reality in our society that we all must be aware of and prepare our children to combat. Abusers aren't just strangers offering candy to kids; only 11% are strangers, 29% are family members, 60% are someone known to the family.

Teach your children about modesty, special/private parts of their bodies, good touches/bad touches/secret touches (bathing suit or underclothes line), happy secret, and sad secret, people who would try to hurt them.

I. How To Work

Much of adult life is centered around work. It is both a calling and a means to provide for the necessities of life and to finance the kingdom of God. Therefore, teaching your children a proper work ethic is vital for their lives. Children must learn responsibility, diligence, discipline, excellence, initiative, satisfaction in a job well done, etc.

Give your children chores commensurate with their abilities and train them how to do them. Start at an early age. Toddlers can learn how to put away toys. Be patient and encourage their efforts. Help them to see that families work to serve each other. They are contributing to the family. Teach them to have a cheerful attitude toward work.

Proverbs 10:4 A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

J. Living Skills

Cooking, cleaning, shopping, car, and home maintenance and repair, money management, etc.

K. Academics

- Public school
- Christian school
- Home school

Remember that all instruction involves a worldview. In Ephesians we are told that our instruction is to be the instruction of the Lord. This is why it is so important that parents oversee all the instruction that their child receives no matter what schooling choice they make.

The Bible uses three main words to talk about a well-instructed person.

- knowledge - the accumulation of truth.
- understanding - the ability to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate facts.
- wisdom - the ability to make righteous judgments and correct applications.

There is a worldly understanding and wisdom and a godly one.

Colossians 2:3 Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...**2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ

III. HOW TO TEACH

Deuteronomy 6:7 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.

A. Formally

One of the key thoughts of Deuteronomy is be careful (take care, carefully). This impressing on our children is to be undertaken with great purpose, accuracy and thoroughness.

WILLIAM GURNALL - "This is the difference between religion and atheism, religion doth not grow without planting, but will die even where it is planted without watering. Atheism, irreligion, and profaneness are weeds that will grow without setting, but they will not die without plucking up."

Some basic principles: Start young; Outline and oversee a plan for personal devotions; have some type of family devotions, try to get some one-on-one time with each child.

How often? – if I had it to do over I would do a little something every day, especially when they are young. Small but consistent will accomplish much.

B. Informally

Be alert to and take advantage of the many teachable moments that each day will present you with. This requires time with your family; that your heart be inclined toward God; and watchfulness – awareness of teachable moments.

This will also require you to get them home more often, limit activities, time with friends, etc. It will also require you to think through what they do at home, e.g. how much TV, video games, computer time, etc.