

How do we train our children and youth to share their faith with others?

Where we typically come from...

While some of the answers vary between parents, all Christians want their children to have lifelong faith in the Lord so that one day they will be with the Lord in heaven. Parents promise at baptism to prepare their children by bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Along with their preparation for heaven we also want them to be happy and healthy physically, mentally, emotionally, and in their relationships with other people. We are looking to develop Christ centered character that exhibits His love and grace each and every day.

How God Looks at the Youth

The youth of our congregation are, first and foremost, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to treat them with the same love and respect that we give to any fellow believer. They too are Children of the Most High King! **"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."** (Matt 18:10) Often the world minimizes the value of the youth as seen through abortion, abuse, or abandonment; and yet we see the value Jesus placed on them when He rebuked His disciples who tried to deny Him access to the children. Even in the middle of His "important adult matters" Jesus said, **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"** (Mk 10:14). They are precious in His sight.

What is God's guidance in training our youth?

We have the command from our Lord: **"Train up a child in the way they should go,"** (Prov 22:6) and **"teach them to observe all things I have commanded you."** (Mt 28:20) Yet how do we accomplish this? Are we modeling for the youth what the Lord models for us? Just as He is tender, trustworthy, kind, firm, patient with our own adult childishness, stubbornness, and slowness to learn, so also should we be with our youth, modeling for them His forgiveness, slowness to anger, love and grace. Let us not forget the speck in our own eye as we raise our children (Lk 6:42).

So how do we go about it?

There are many ways we can train our youth in their Christian walk and so model an evangelical approach to their life.

Showing them what is important by the amount of time we spend doing it...

It's easy to inadvertently put relationships on a backburner in our busy world. But just as our relationship with our Lord grows deeper as we spend time with Him in his Word, so too is time just "being" with our children key in nurturing and training them in their walk. The Lord was with His disciples "spending time with them and baptizing." (John 3:22) Let us spend time with the youth, teaching them His truth "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Duet 11:9) We should beware of too much "doing" and "going" if it distracts us from our first love - even in the face of other wonderful pursuits.

Studying the Word together...

We all need frequent study of God and his Word. How can we witness to what we don't know? How can we keep our hearts in tune with God when we don't spend time with him? We have an opportunity to model as we take time for our own personal devotions, speaking as Moses: "**If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so that I may know you.**" (Ex 33:13) We can also setup time for family or small group devotions. As we take each opportunity to be with children in the Word, utilizing theological commentaries, devotional books, and conversations with other Christians. In doing so, helping them to search the scriptures, testing what they hear in the world in the light of God's Word in humbleness and a willingness to grow.

Memorize scripture together...

As the Lord wrote His covenant on the hearts of the Israelite's, (Jer 31:33) we can have the Word etched into our own hearts and minds. Memorization helps us carry the Word with us, making it readily available for the Spirit to use. Using cards, drawing pictures, writing a tune, or even bouncing a ball back and forth; can be good opportunities to review together the precious Words of our God, who will use the Word to "guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."(Phil 4:7)

Pray together...

The Lord taught us to pray "**our Father who art in heaven,**"(Mt 6:9). Similarly we also have an opportunity to teach our youth to pray. We can pray for many things, guidance in understanding and learning, spiritual gifts, or for help in adversity. It may at times feel awkward, but it is an important opportunity to model prayer for a child. Ask your child to pray for you and with you, remembering that the Lord exhorts us to have the faith of a child in order for us to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mk 10:13-16)

Working together...

“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.” (Lk 6:40) Just as we did, so the youth need to be trained in many things. As we work together we teach not only the skills they will need in life but also model a Godly way to approach their work. While it often takes more time to accomplish a task it will help them to grow in the gifts they have been given.

Listening to their concerns...

“Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth.”(Ps 54:2) How often do we like David pray to the Lord in times of trial or need? We can model our Lord’s attentive ear with our youth as we seek out their thoughts with genuine interest, being trustworthy as they come to us with their deepest thoughts and feelings, and demonstrating respect for their concerns. We all have questions about our life and faith. As we actively seek out their thoughts, we help them learn to seek God’s direction “with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Pe 3:15)

Modeling a good witness...

“Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” (Mt 12:34-35) Daily we have the opportunity to demonstrate our thought process as a Christian in the things we say and do. Our view of the world is immersed in God’s grace, but those around us can’t read our minds. We can speak our faith out loud as we discuss things great and small. “There goes the ambulance! God, please help both the hurt person and the EMTs.” “I’m glad God always forgives us!” “I apologize for assuming that you deliberately ignored me; I will try not to lash out but instead work to reconnect with you.” It may feel awkward at first, but the more this verbalization becomes a habit, the more we very naturally witness during the course of daily life.

Encourage Speaking Up...

Then Moses said to the Lord, **“Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”** (Ex 4:10) One of the most intimidating things about sharing our faith is the feeling that we don’t know enough, or that we’ll say something wrong. Yes, we might. None of us are perfect in living and speaking our faith—so we have plenty of opportunity to demonstrate humility by apologizing and fixing our mistakes. Encourage the youth to speak up, whether about God or other things. Pray with them for God to give the words, mindful that the power is the Holy Spirit working through the word, trusting that the word will not return void (Is 55:11).

Our youth are a precious gift from the Lord, and by carefully tending that gift we have a wonderful opportunity to train the next generation that will carry on the saving message of Christ crucified. May we humbly, with His grace, lead them in the way in which they should go.