

HEART, SOUL, AND MIND

RAISING KIDS TO
KNOW AND LOVE GOD



Patricia Batten



introduction

Heart, Soul, and Mind

Raising Kids to Know and Love God

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a step-by-step manual for raising children who were thoughtful, courteous, kind, strong... name whichever positive adjective you like...? But what if there was something that was more important than all of that? What if there was a parenting goal that no matter what later life would bring would give your children the foundation they needed to be able to weather the storms of life?

In *Heart, Soul, and Mind*, Patricia Batten explores the wisdom of the ancient Israelites for raising kids in our complicated world. Looking at one of the foundational declarations of faith in God, the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4–9, she pulls out practical guidance for teaching our children who God is, what he has done, and how we can respond to him.

There is no formula for perfect children, but by impressing your kids with God, you give them a firm foundation and start them down a path to life the way God intended it to be.

Our Daily Bread Ministries

contents

one

**Who is responsible for
impressing God on a child?.....5**

two

**What do we impress
on our children?.....9**

three

**What does it look like
to love God with everything
we've got?.....14**

four

**When and where do we
impress our kids with God?24**

five

**How do imperfect parents
impress their kids with God?.....31**

EDITORS: J.R. Hudberg, Monica LaRose, Peggy Willison

COVER IMAGE: Pingpao via Adobe Stock

DESIGN: Steve Gier

INTERIOR IMAGES: (p.1) Pingpao via Adobe Stock; (p.5) Kostia via Adobe Stock; (p.9) Ivanko80 via Adobe Stock; (p.14) Doidam10 via Adobe Stock; (p.24) DisobeyArt via Shutterstock.com; (p.31) KieferPix via Shutterstock.com

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Printed in USA



one

Who is responsible for impressing God on a child?

Have you ever felt like you've floundered or even failed when it comes to teaching your kids the faith?

One morning when my oldest child was three years old, he trudged down the stairs. From my perch at the kitchen island, I knew something was wrong because toddlers don't trudge. They leap. They bound. They come crashing down. Then I heard it. He had the sniffles. You know what that sounds like. In fact, kids like to prove it to you. They take pride in demonstrating their symptoms. He planted his little thirty-six-inch body in front of me and poked his nose

high into the air like a hound catching the scent of a fox. “See,” he said. “I have a cold.” His nose was red and crusty. It was stuffy and drippy. “You want to hear it?” he asked. (Of course I did. What mother wouldn’t want to hear congestion?)

“Yes,” I said as I mustered an early morning enthusiasm. “Let me hear your sniffles.”

He lifted his shoulders to his ears in a seeming attempt to suck in all of the air in the kitchen. But the enemy known as “Stiffness” blocked it. Stiffness battled the airflow and beat it back. The cold was in control.

“See, I can’t breathe,” he murmured.

Then the little guy spoke again and I’ll never forget what he said: “God didn’t hear my prayer last night.”

“He didn’t?” I asked.

“No. I asked him to take away my sniffles and he didn’t do it. He didn’t hear me. Why didn’t he hear me?”

My red-cheeked, heavy-eyed preschooler was disappointed in God, and he was looking to me for answers. That’s when I gave my secret ‘mom look’ to God. I crinkled my forehead and turned my eyes heavenward. I pursed my lips ever so slightly. As I sighed, I released a silent, rapid rant to God: *You couldn’t have healed his cold? Or even improved it? I’ve been trying to teach him about you. Work with me here! It’s so simple: He prays to you. You heal the cold. He learns that you’re real and that you care, and he gives you the glory. But since you didn’t do it my way, God, now I’m stuck trying to answer a deep theological question from a stuffy three-year old! We could have done this the easy way, God!*

Completely unaware of my internal temper tantrum, my drippy little boy stared up at me, patiently waiting for an answer.

Despite years of formal theological training, I had no idea how to respond to the heartfelt question of my own son. I gave a clumsy answer and then I dwelled on it for the next forty-eight hours. I felt defeated. Had I floundered and maybe even failed in teaching him the faith?

What about you? Maybe you gave a clumsy answer to a heartfelt question or you questioned a clumsy but heartfelt answer. You had the wrong answer or no answer at all.

In those moments, perhaps you've been tempted to believe that parents should leave it to the religious experts—the pastors and preachers; the Sunday school superintendents and teachers.

But God has involved parents in teaching the faith since the time of Moses.

Before the nation entered the Promised Land, Moses spoke to the assembly. He reminded the people of God's commandments and laws. He said: "These commandments that I am giving you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children" (DEUTERONOMY 6:6–7).

Upon entering the Promised Land, parents would be responsible for the religious education of their children.

I imagine many mothers and fathers felt a weight of responsibility bearing down on them. Impress God's commandments on their children? How would they do

that? For starters, there were 613 commandments, laws and regulations! Where would they begin? And the word ‘impressed’ implied skill and depth. The word is used of the Ten Commandments that were engraved on stone tablets. Impressions aren’t made overnight. They’re chiseled by an experienced craftsman, bit by bit, in order to make a deep and lasting impression. As these mothers and fathers entered a new land, they were given a new educational mandate: Teach your children about God.

But parents today live under grace, not law. And that makes all the difference. We are not engraving a long list of rules and regulations on our children; we are engraving a love for God in response to his grace.

As Christian parents living in the twenty-first century, we have the responsibility to share our faith with our kids. But we do not carry this weight of responsibility alone. The Holy Spirit guides us and encourages us every step of the way. In his book, *Our Father Abraham*, Marvin Wilson says:

For various reasons—ignorance, convenience, or default of responsibility—the Church has often taken the place of the family. But the Church was never intended to be a substitute for the home. Nothing in God’s plan has ever replaced the home as bearing primary responsibility for imparting Christian values and insuring godly nourishment and growth for each family member.



two

What do we impress on our children?

What did the ancient Israelites teach their kids about God? Deuteronomy 6:4–9, to this day a foundational text in Judaism, is a good starting point. Verse four is commonly referred to as the Shema, taken from the first Hebrew word of the verse, “hear.”

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

It's most likely the very first passage that Jesus learned as a toddler. His father, Joseph, would have taught him the verse, and he would have committed it to memory by age three. In fact, all little boys would have learned the verse from their fathers.■

🔸 *“According to the Babylonian Talmud (SUKKAH 42A), Jewish boys were taught this biblical passage as soon as they could speak. Since the Talmud specifies that “**the father** must teach him” (i.e., the son), we may confidently assume that Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, was responsible for fulfilling this task.”*
(WILSON, OUR FATHER ABRAHAM, 123)

The Shema was a passage of Scripture that was impressed upon Jesus’ heart—chiseled so deep into his well of knowledge that he could easily draw from it as an adult and find refreshment. Jesus referred to it in his answer to the Pharisees when they asked him what the greatest commandment was (MARK 12:28–30).

Parents Teach a Confession: The LORD our God, the LORD is One

The first part of the Shema is a confession of faith, not a prayer. The confession that the “the LORD our God, the LORD is one” articulates a basic belief about God.

The people were acknowledging that the LORD was their God, and that He was the only God. It's like saying, The LORD is our God. He's the only one.

The Israelites were God's chosen people, and He was their God. They needed to affirm that God was their God—the One who saved them from bondage in Egypt. They also confessed that He was the only God. Surrounded by pagan nations who worshipped many different gods, the Israelites distinguished themselves from their neighbors by worshiping the one true God alone—the God who saved them from slavery.

Perched on the edge of the Promised Land, after wandering in the wilderness for nearly four decades, Moses reminded the Israelites about God's mighty acts. God had saved them through awesome deeds so the Israelites would know that the LORD was indeed God, and that He was the only God:

Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other. (DEUTERONOMY 4:32B–35)

God, Revealed in Jesus Christ, Is the One and Only God

But what does this confession mean for Christian parents today? What exactly do Christian parents teach their kids about God? We teach that God, who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, is our God, and that he is the one and only true God. God has saved us from the bondage of sin through the mighty, miraculous act of Christ's resurrection. It's this confession of faith that Christian parents teach their children in the hopes that their kids will someday make the confession on their own and pass it down to the next generation.

Teaching Confession against the Cultural Tide

But such a confession is a tough sell in our culture: God, revealed in Jesus Christ is the one true God. He's not one among many. He's not the best option. He's the one true God.

We teach our kids this confession of faith even when it's not popular. Many of the kids that our children interact with at school and at play are not being taught the truth about God. Perhaps like me, you know some parents who are intentionally not raising their children in a particular faith because they want their kids to "make their own decisions." For them, teaching a child that God, revealed in Jesus Christ is the one true God is absolutely ridiculous!

One of my sons had a playdate around Christmastime. My mantle was set with the Nativity.

Our young guest approached the fireplace and asked what the ceramic display was all about. “These figures tell a story,” I said. “The Christmas story.” He crinkled his face, clearly confused. I cradled each piece in my hands. “This is Joseph and this is Mary. Here’s baby Jesus, God’s Son.” I showed him the shepherds and the oxen; the angel and the star. This little boy had never heard the Christmas story. Ever.

Impress Compassion and Kindness with Conviction

When Christian parents impress God on their kids, they teach them to make this confession with conviction. But when that confession is shared with others, parents also have a duty to teach their kids that love and grace must guide it. Not everyone believes that God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the one true God. When we speak the truth about God, it’s helpful to remember what the apostle Paul said to the Colossian believers: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (COLOSSIANS 4:6).

Parents teach their kids that God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is indeed the one true God. But there’s more. There are natural implications to this bold confession. So in our next chapter, we’ll consider teaching our kids how to respond to that confession of faith.



three

What does it look like to love God with everything we've got?

***Love the One True God with
Everything You've Got***

When we really believe that God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the one true God who has saved us, then it only makes sense that we'd respond in love and worship. Deuteronomy 6:5 says to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This is called the greatest commandment. It's like Moses is saying, "love the LORD with everything you've got."

Loving God with everything we've got means loving him with our heart, head, and hands.

Loving God with our Heart

We love God with our heart¹ through experience. This domain includes feelings, emotions, and attitudes.

1 In the Old Testament, the word **“heart”** referred to the center of a person, that part of us that constitutes the seat of our intellect, emotion and will. It is the center of everything that makes us who we are, from which we do all our thinking, choosing, feeling, and doing.

Israel demonstrated their love for God by experiencing various festivals throughout the course of a year. They followed an agricultural calendar of festivals and feasts that not only celebrated the harvest but commemorated God's mighty acts in history. Israelites entered into the story of the Passover by eating food and herbs that reminded them of their ancestor's flight from Egypt. In the Festival of Booths, the people pilgrimaged to Jerusalem, where they lived in tents for several days to remind them of their forefather's forty years of wilderness wanderings. They experienced worship of the one true God when they brought a sheep or a pigeon into the Temple court to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to a holy God. All of these and many more provided experiences in which attitudes and values and emotions were tested and fine-tuned and ultimately turned one's heart toward God in love and adoration.

Today, a similar way we love God with our hearts is by entering into corporate worship, where we experience God's presence in the midst of his people. Our hearts are filled with joy as we sing hymns and songs that praise him. The Holy Spirit convicts us as we listen to sermons or celebrate the Lord's Supper. Our emotions of gratitude are tugged when we witness the baptism of a new believer.

But the emotions we feel during corporate worship aren't meant to be limited to the times we worship in community. Surely Mary, the mother of Jesus, when looking at her infant son, cradled love and awe deep in her heart. That love and awe moved from her heart to heaven in worship. When I check on my sleeping children before I go to bed, I am overwhelmed with love for them. That love in my heart rises to heaven in praise and thanksgiving. And that's an act of worship, too. I'm not worshipping my child. I'm worshipping the God who made him and entrusted him to me.

One Communion Sunday, after the pastor of our church finished explaining the meaning of the bread and the cup, my nine-year old son reached across the pew and tugged at my shirt. There was a sense of urgency in his voice as he whispered: "Can I take communion? I know what it means. Jesus died for our sin. The bread is a symbol of his body and the cup represents his blood. I'm ready, mom!" My son understood intellectually and now he was ready to participate emotionally. He valued Jesus' sacrifice not only in his head; he valued it in his heart.

Loving God with Our Minds

Another way to understand “soul” is “mind.” In Hebrew culture the word *soul*,¹ among other things, was sometimes used to refer to the seat of thought, will, and desire, similar to the word *heart*. When we love God with our minds, we make the effort to learn who he is and what he has done. We also are educated about all that God desires of us. One of the best ways to love God with our minds is to read and study the Bible. God has revealed himself to us through his Word. This is called special revelation. We love God with our minds by studying his revelation in Scripture.

➤ *In modern usage, the word “**soul**” is often used to capture the idea of a disembodied spirit within us that survives after death. In the Old Testament, however, the Hebrew word translated “soul” (nephesh) usually refers to the entire person as a living being, or, as seems to be the case in Deuteronomy 6:5, to the center of a person, that which directs their thoughts, desires, and will.*

But it’s also true that God reveals himself through nature, or general revelation. All truth is God’s truth. That means when we study God’s creation and uncover his truth through exploration of the world around us and through various academic disciplines, we are still loving God with our minds.

One of our boys received a butterfly garden for his birthday. It was shipped to the house with five live caterpillars. We placed the mesh habitat in our family room and waited. One by one, each caterpillar

climbed to the top of the habitat and found a spot to form a cocoon. After about a week, the caterpillars emerged from their chrysalis and we had butterflies! We released them in our backyard and watched them flutter around our garden over the next few days. God's hand is evident in the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. God reveals something about himself in nature. This is an example of general revelation.

Studying God by reading the Bible and by studying the world around us are both ways to love God with our minds.

Loving God with Our Hands

God created us as whole beings and each part of us is to respond to him in love. That includes our hands, used here as a metaphor for our outward actions.

We love God through acts of service. The New Testament writer, James, says that faith without works is dead (JAMES 2:14–26). When we engage in service projects or mission trips, we are loving God with our hands. When we serve turkey, stuffing, and potatoes to the homeless at a shelter, we are loving God with our hands. When we dig a ditch to build a new home for a family who needs shelter, we are loving God with our hands. When we teach Sunday school to adults or children, we are loving God with our hands.

Every Friday afternoon at our church, a card table is set up in the middle of the office. Three people sit in metal chairs, folding bulletins. One Friday, I met

Bob, age ninety. He had recently lost his wife of sixty years. Suffering greatly, he was losing the will to live. But instead of wilting away, he started to see others and serve others.

Although he had never facilitated one, he saw a need for a Bible study at the senior residence where he made his home and decided to start one. Fourteen residents attend every Friday morning to explore God's Word. A strong thinker and an excellent writer, he penned an article for the local paper in order to encourage others to serve those around them. Here's what he said:

Sitting one day I noticed many had difficulty in opening tiny Half and Half creamers and pads of butter. It is hard enough for me but terribly difficult for someone with Parkinson's, poor eyesight or arthritic fingers. I now open these packs for anyone sitting with me.¹

Bob was doing more than opening creamers and packets of butter. He was using his fine-motor skills—his hands—to love God.

Kids are great at loving God with their hands! I remember one Advent watching my boys huddled around piles of greenery and winterberry holly, red bows, pinecones, and colorful Christmas balls and bells. They wanted to make the perfect wreath to give to Nana. From a design point of view, the wreath might have received low marks, but from my mom's

1 Campbell, Robert. "Revelation." *The Daily News*, Tuesday, December 5, 2017.

perspective, it was a huge success. They were loving God with their hands.

Balancing Heart, Head, and Hands

Our kids will be drawn to one area more than another and as parents, we will also be prone to emphasize one domain over the other. Yes, we bounce in and out of all of these areas and there's overlap in each, but there's probably one or maybe two that we're most drawn to.

The key is balance. Figure out in what domain you are most often demonstrating your love for God. There's a good possibility that's the domain you emphasize at home with your kids. Consider giving your kids opportunities in every area—heart, head, and hands—to love God.

Why is it important to love God with heart, head, and hands or, to say it another way, with everything we've got? Because he is our God, the one who revealed himself to us and gave it all to save us, so we love him with all we've got. It makes sense.

But the passage tells us there's another way we demonstrate our love for God.

Loving God Through Obedience

Deuteronomy 6 shows us that we love God when we obey God.

In Israel, when Moses spoke to the people and said “Hear, O Israel,” he wasn't simply rounding up the gang. He wasn't saying “bring it in folks, we're about to get started.” To hear meant to obey. To hear God without obeying is to not hear God at all.

What, then, does Moses want the people to hear and obey? The commandments. Why was it so important that they hear and obey the commandments? Because obedience demonstrates love of the one true God. Think about it this way; when we were kids, our parents had rules. In an ideal world, we obeyed them out of love and respect for them.

I met Rich, my husband, in high school. We dated. His curfew was 11:30. And he never missed it. He obeyed his parents because that's how he demonstrated love and respect for them.

The Israelites obeyed God because they loved him. They loved him because he was the one true God. He was their God. Parents were given the enormous responsibility of teaching their children to love the one true God by obeying him.

But it's important to remember that the Israelites often failed to obey more than they succeeded. Even as recipients of God's grace and favor, people turned their backs on God. Yes, they had come out of Egypt by God's mighty hand, by his grace and favor, yet so often, they failed to follow the one who saved them. How is it different for us? Is there any hope for us?

Yes. There's hope! Do you know that when Jesus first spoke Deuteronomy 6:4–9 as a toddler, he was most likely living in the land of Egypt? That's where the family lived as refugees after fleeing the wrath of Herod. Egypt.

Jesus would also “come out of Egypt,” but unlike the Israelites, he would come out following God's law perfectly. He would love God without defect in heart,

soul, and strength. Not only do we have an example in Christ in how to obey; we have a Savior who sends his Spirit to help us obey.

Balanced Teaching: Biblical Truth or Obedience?

What happens when parents neglect part of this or emphasize one aspect over the other? What if we teach our kids to obey God without ever teaching them who God really is? Their obedience won't be a loving response to God's grace and glory. And that kind of obedience breeds resentment. It doesn't stand the test of time. It sinks in the suffering that every human life endures. Or what if we only teach our kids who God is, but we never talk to them about their response to God? Then we've trained kids that right answers are more important than living with integrity. Those kids can spout off Bible verses about suffering, but they won't know how to hold someone's hand through it. Some parents are heavy on obedience. Others are light in teaching biblical truths about God. Why? It's probably because one comes more naturally to us than the other. One is in our parental comfort zone and the other is not.

Teaching Yourself to Learn

When something is out of our comfort zone as parents, we can find out how to fill the gap. If the area of the heart needs attention, then we might consider offering our kids more ways in which to experience worship and enter into the story of salvation: playing

a role in the annual Christmas pageant or attending a Christian concert.

If we struggle with passing on the “head” part of the faith, resources on basic Christian beliefs might be helpful or we might pick up a modern translation of a catechism—question and answer books designed to teach fundamentals of the faith.

Service opportunities abound in every city and town if the “hands” need more activity. Many projects can be done right at home. Roll up your sleeves with the kids and bake some cookies for the residents of the local senior home; pick up a rake and fill some bags for your neighbor. And of course, check out the resources and ministries at your local church.

Parents might easily feel overwhelmed and unprepared for this task of teaching their children about God. But there’s hope for parents! In God’s grace and mercy, he designed teaching and learning to follow the natural rhythms of everyday life, empowered and guided by the presence of the Spirit.

We must never forget that as followers of Jesus Christ, we’ve been given the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a gift given to every believer. What does the Holy Spirit do in our lives? The Spirit guides us, intercedes for us, comforts us, and teaches us (JOHN 14:26; ROMANS 8:14; ROMANS 8:26). Parents, we are not alone in the task of raising our kids. The Spirit is not some distant, faraway force. God’s Spirit lives inside us, and we can rely on that power to produce in us everything we need to be the parents God wants us to be.



four

When and where do we impress our kids with God?

Teaching While We Live Life

imagine the parents of Moses's day felt anxious and ill-equipped when he told them to impress God's commandments on their children and all that task implied. Like you, their brains were bursting with other responsibilities in addition to impressing God's law on their kids.

What else was on their minds? Besides their role as religious educators, these parents were making

a major move from the wilderness to the Promised Land. They were packing up and heading out to a new land. Not a new home in a nearby neighborhood; not a new nook in a friends' neck of the woods. They were moving to a new country that was already populated by pagan residents. Now that's a move!

Big changes were happening all around them, and these moms and dads needed to teach their kids the faith even while they handled a major life hurdle.

Several years ago, my husband and I moved to a different neighborhood in our city. The new house was 2.4 miles from the old one. It was a six-minute drive that has taken ten years to unpack. The stress of our move doesn't begin to compare with the transition the Israelites underwent. Even so, we were overwhelmed.

Parenting doesn't exist apart from daily life. We raise our kids in the faith while we have a difficult season at work; while we have a trying season in our marriage; while we battle the flu; while money is tight and cultural morals are loose; while we care for aging parents; while we serve on committees with long meetings and long-winded members; while we clean the house and cook supper; while we referee sibling rivalries; while we stare at a tear-streaked math sheet; while they win the part and lose the race; while they lose the part and win the race; while we blast advice about bullies and beauty and brains; while we deal with IEPs and ADHD and children on the spectrum and learning disabilities and physical and behavioral problems; while we mourn.

We teach our children about God while we live life with his help.

When and Where Do Parents Impress God on Their Kids?

And that's exactly how God intended it. After Moses instructs the Israelites to impress God's commandments on their children, he tells them when and where to do it: "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (DEUTERONOMY 6:7-9). In other words, we teach our children about God while we live daily life.

It's in the routines of daily living that we impress God on our kids. Whether we're shuffling them out of the house to catch the bus; shuttling them from the field to the dance studio; cooking supper and cleaning house; woodworking or knitting, God can be impressed on our kids during the daily rituals of life.

When You Sit at Home

Think about the times in which you sit at home with your kids. Mealtimes come to mind—especially when the kids are small and not scattered across town involved in various activities. How might parents engrave God on their kids around the dinner table? Taking a moment to pause and give thanks is an easy way to remind kids to honor the one true God. Establish a predictable pattern of prayer.

Give kids an opportunity to pray. Our middle child

always gives a genuine prayer of thanksgiving for our two dogs and cat—of course, not for his brothers or parents! But he's talking to God and learning to give thanks to the one true God.

Other prayer times won't be so predictable. Seize the opportunity to pray with your kids when the need arises. Maybe your son is worried about an upcoming test or your daughter is having some trouble with a friend. Pray on the spot. You might be in the car or folding laundry.

We can impress God on our kids while we're in our homes by watching television shows and listening to music that have the qualities listed in Philippians 4:8: "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

When You Walk Along the Road

Today, this is drive time—minutes and hours spent in the car. How do we engrave God on our kids while we navigate highways and byways? Through old-fashioned conversation. That doesn't mean we strap them in and lecture our captive audience for eighteen miles, but we can make the most of any opportunity for conversation. Sometimes, it seems that kids "open up" while being chauffeured by mom and dad. After a sour soccer practice or a terrible test or a fight with a friend, hopping into the car with mom or dad who has a solid faith will give kids confidence. They are loved by you. They are loved by the one true God.

It's no secret that transporting teens and transporting toddlers is as different as driving a sports car and driving a minivan. They represent two very different passengers. Parents impress God on their children by employing different methods. Toddlers and infants might respond to Bible songs about the walls of Jericho or Father Abraham. They are always up for a loud and lively, big on hand motions, and high on the silly spectrum sing-a-long. Teach them songs about God right away. Toss in a memory verse. Find other creative ways to help your kids soak in the good news of God's love.

When You Lie Down

Establish a bedtime routine. Consider closing the day with a Bible story and prayer. Invest in a kids' story Bible. Invest in many. A father once asked me to suggest a Bible for his toddler. I gave him one of my favorites. He came to me about a month later and said, "We finished reading that one. What else do you have?" I had a list, but I encouraged him to keep reading the one he already had. A kids' book of Bible stories is meant to be read over and over and over again—to the point where the pages are taped and kids will know the stories by heart and cherish them. Involve kids in bedtime reading. Ask them to select what story they want each night. Act it out or have them read or fill in certain words and phrases.

When You Get Up

Our family, probably like yours, is pressed for time during the school year. I send my kids off in the

morning with a quick prayer. We choose one verse for the school year and memorize it. The kids recite it most days before they head out the door. Both of these take about one minute of our morning, and there are many mornings that we miss it. I'm not jamming toast with a spread of deep theology down their throats. Instead, they're feasting on God's Word as part of their daily diet. It's a manageable bite. They're starting the day acknowledging that a good and gracious God watches over them and loves them.

Tie and Bind

God's Word should be weaved into the fabric of our lives. In Old Testament times, Jews would bind little boxes to their wrists and foreheads. Passages of Scripture were tucked inside each box. They also posted boxes, called mezuzahs, on the doorframes to their homes which signified that the entire home took God's Word seriously.

None of this happens automatically. It takes intentionality on the part of parents, and daily reliance on the Spirit for wisdom.

In the Real World

We could talk about making a schedule—impressing God at home when we sit together, drive together, and go through our morning and evening routines. But maybe it's better to talk about being intentional about impressing God on our kids. Some of that time will be planned—maybe prayer and conversation during dinner or Bible story at night or an early

morning send-off Bible verse. Other times will not be planned at all, but since we are intentional about impressing our kids with God, we'll be able to seize the moment and respond to opportunities to talk about God. This will look different for kids of different ages.

Impressing our kids with God should be manageable, not overwhelming. It should flow out of the natural rhythms of a life lived in tune with the Spirit.



five

How do imperfect parents impress their kids with God?

Y

Upon Our Hearts

ou don't need a seminary education to impress God on your kids, but you do need to be a person on whom God has been impressed.

Scripture and the good news of Christ must first and foremost be upon our hearts. We can't impress something on someone else that hasn't first been engraved in us. Sure, we can fake it for a while. But our kids will find us out, and sooner than we think. Our kids will respect our genuine faith. Not perfect faith, but real faith. And real faith falters, but clings to the cross.

When I was in college, the famous violinist Itzhak Perlman played for an intimate gathering of students and professors. His legs held captive to braces due to polio as a child, Perlman labored across the platform to the single chair, center-stage. Then he took up his violin, and instantly it was his audience who was held captive, struck by the passion and intensity with which he played. That intricately carved piece of wood was not an instrument separate from the musician; it was part of him. When he spoke about the violin, he spoke with a tender conviction.

I could never speak about the violin the way Perlman did. It simply wasn't a part of my life. But it was impressed on Perlman's. It was on his heart, and because of the way he played it and spoke about it, he was engraving an appreciation for it on my heart too.

When God is upon our hearts as parents, it will pour over to our children. When my son asked me why God didn't answer his prayer and heal his cold, I was tongue-tied. I was disappointed in myself. How would I raise my kids in the faith when I couldn't answer a question about a cold? Then I realized that my son had prayed to God on his own! This three-year old went to God in prayer and asked God for help. Where did he learn to do that? From me. An imperfect parent—but a parent on whom God and our need for him had been impressed.

And when God is upon your heart, your kids will learn from you.



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