

# INTENTIONAL PARENTING



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# GIVING A STRONG SPIRITUAL LEGACY

Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families  
Adapted by Riverside Church of Christ

As believing parents, we want our children to embrace the Christian faith and make it their own. But many teens and young adults walk away from Christianity at some point, leaving their parents to wonder what went wrong. While questioning the religious tradition of childhood is part of growing up, how can you leave behind a spiritual legacy that will survive even the most tumultuous times in your children's lives?

Here are some ideas for instilling a solid spiritual foundation in your family:

## THE LEGACY PRINCIPLE

Scripture tells us that what we do today directly influences the multi-generational cycle of family traits, beliefs and actions — for good or bad (Exodus 20:5-6, Psalm 78:5-8). Children often won't buy into a belief system that their parents haven't fully and authentically modeled.

Some of us may also need to break negative cycles that may have started with our own upbringing in order to launch a new, improved legacy for the next generation.

## THE LIKELIHOOD PRINCIPLE

Here's the good news: in the context of healthy relationships, children tend to embrace the values of their parents. That's a big part of the reason parents are warned not to *provoke your children to anger*, but rather *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. (Ephesians 6:4) Having a strong relationship with each of your children is the key.

## THE LENSES PRINCIPLE

Jesus taught that our enemy's primary weapon is deception - getting us to believe and live according to lies rather than truth (John 8:44). Our children are growing up in a culture that bombards them with lies without them even realizing it.

An hour or two per week at church is no match for the hundreds of hours spent with media, school, and friends. It is the job of the parents to equip children with the corrective "lenses" of truth so they can better navigate the deceptive roads of life.

## THE LEARNING PRINCIPLE

Spiritual training must be age-appropriate and geared toward the individual maturity level of each child. Some kids connect easily with spiritually abstract concepts while others need more practical examples.

Children often fall into one of three stages that should influence the methods we choose for discussing our faith and values at home.

### THE IMPRINT PERIOD: (toddler to about age 7)

Small children are all ears. Young children soak in what we tell them — so this is an ideal season for teaching them basic Bible stories, memorization, and other building block truths of Christianity.

### THE IMPRESSION PERIOD: (about age 8 to early teen)

During this season, children no longer accept what we say at face value. They may question us, push back, or even argue.

While this can often become frustrating for parents, this is a positive part of their faith development because it means they have grown past blind acceptance and are ready for deeper understanding.

### THE COACHING PERIOD: (early teen to young adult)

Our job changes when the kids enter the coaching period. We can motivate, encourage, challenge, and advise. We can't force-feed. We can help them clearly articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking, remind them of the "basics" learned during the "practices" of the imprint and impression years.

We can provide a safe environment to wrestle with, even question, the values they've learned. Maintaining strong relationship and frequent dialogue are vital in this stage.

In light of these realities, parents can become intentional about creating and capturing opportunities to nurture the roots of faith in their children.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Recommended Books

*It Starts at Home* (by Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope) helps parents understand faith formation at home and how to be intentional.

*Parenting Beyond Your Capacity* (by Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof) encourages parents to partner with the faith community to bring the next generation into the family of God - and keep them there.

*Parent's Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children* (by Dr. John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Bruner) provides simple, practical ways to help parents tell their children what they believe as well as show them how to make faith in God part of everyday life.

*Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* (by Joe White and Jim Weidmann) helps parents coach the faith formation of older children.

*The Blessing* (by Dr. John Trent) explains the life-changing gift the Bible calls "the blessing."

### Recommended Website

**Movienightchat.com** recommends films and spiritual discussion ideas for parent/teen movie nights.