

Sharing Jesus

WITH YOUR CHILDREN

BY DR. JAMES DOBSON

We should start teaching the fundamentals of the faith to children as soon as they can talk. My parents followed that plan. The first word I learned to spell was J-E-S-U-S. When I forgot it, my mother patiently taught it to me again. She told me He was my friend, and that He loved me.

The basics go from there to an understanding of who God is, what He accomplished in Christ, and what He expects us to do. This teaching must begin very early in childhood and continue as the years roll by. The most effective teaching tool is the modeling provided by the parents at home.

Many parents have asked for practical help with the spiritual training of their children. I have turned to two experts, Robert and (the late) Bobbie Wolgemuth, who have worked extensively with boys and girls. Bobbie especially was a “guru” with little people. In their book, *How To Lead Your Child To Christ*, they share some ideas, stories, and explanations to help moms and dads teach basic Christian concepts at home. I’ve included some of them on the pages that follow.



“The most effective teaching tool is the modeling provided by the parents at home.”

-Dr. James Dobson



Creating a spiritual climate in your home that can help nurture your child's faith is your most important assignment. Here are some strategies that can help insure that your child will be ready to accept God's gift of grace when the time is right.

Bibles for Everyone

If you've not already done so, consider buying a Bible for everyone in your family, including the youngest children. Before you tuck your children into bed at night, read from their Bible. If they're old enough, encourage them to read along. God promises that His Word will provide a lifetime of light for your children's path ... a cure for their lifelong struggle with sin.

How can a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed according to Your word.

With my whole heart I have sought You;

*Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You . . .*

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

(Ps. 119: 9-11, 105 NKJV)

The path to obedience is paved with God's Word.

Memorizing Scripture

One way to help pass on your spiritual legacy to your children is to help them memorize important Scripture verses. Their brains are like wet cement, and the verses they learn will be pressed on their hearts forever.

An easy way to help them memorize a passage is to write a version out on an index card and then look for chances to repeat it, phrase by phrase, to your kids. Riding in the car on the way to school or sitting around the breakfast table are perfect chances for you to work on your verse together. You can even turn the process into a game. A great verse to start with is Philippians 4:13: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (NKJV).

When kids are struggling with doubt or temptation, the Holy Spirit can use His own words, which they've memorized, to strengthen their faith and resolve.



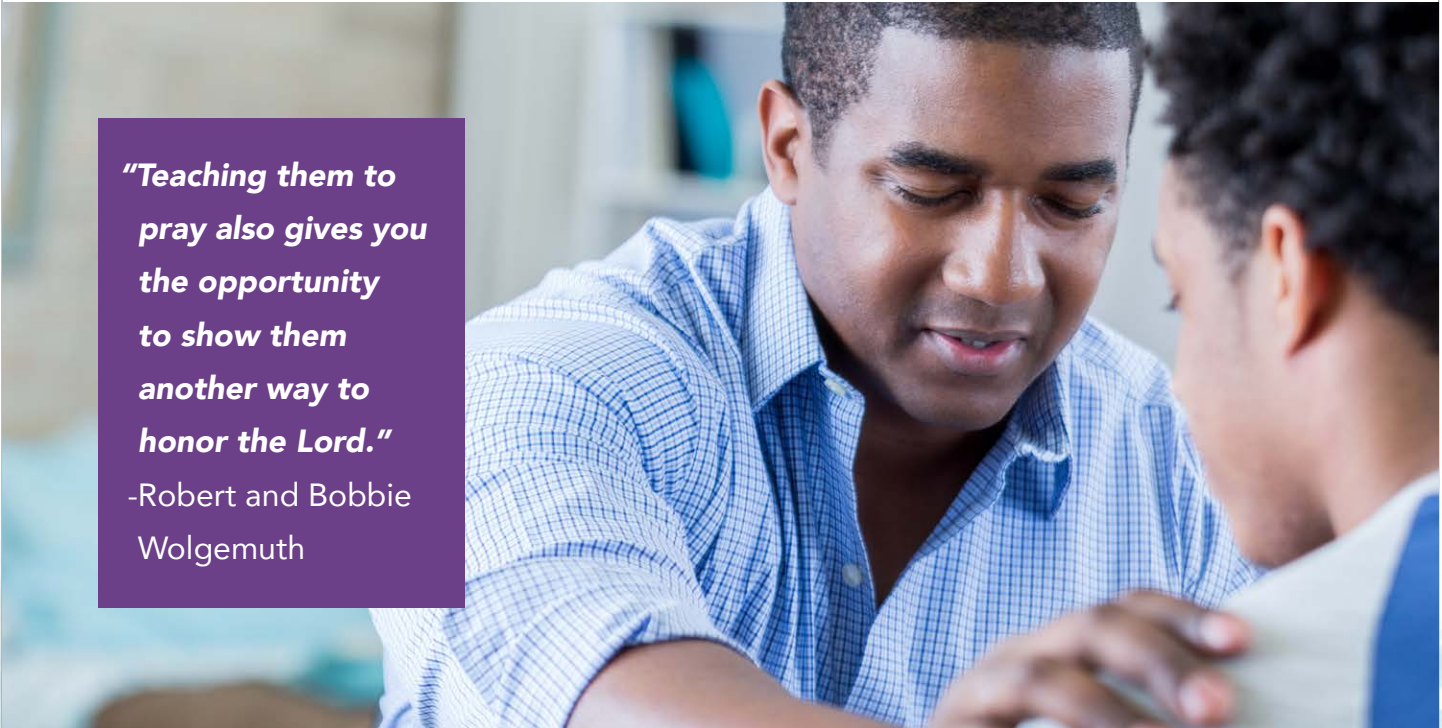
Teach Them to Pray

Bringing your children into God's presence through prayer is an unspeakable privilege. Teaching them to pray also gives you the opportunity to show them another way to honor the Lord.

Mealtimes and bedtimes are ideal times for prayer. By your own example, teach your child how to speak words of affirmation and gratitude to God. The younger your child, the more likely he is to thank God for unusual things, like the frog in the creek or a new box of breakfast cereal. That's okay—the older he gets, the more meaningful these thank-yous will become.

Also teach your child to learn to ask forgiveness for specific actions. By confessing his own sin, your child will begin to understand the truth of a loving heavenly Father's forgiveness.

Then invite your child to bring his requests to the God of the universe, who is listening carefully. Like his list of thank-yous, he may have a long list of everyday requests ("Bless the garbage man, bless my Hot Wheels and Rescue Heroes, please help my T-ball team win tomorrow..."). Again, it's okay. Your child is learning to trust God to meet his needs.



"Teaching them to pray also gives you the opportunity to show them another way to honor the Lord."

-Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth



Finally, help your child close the prayer by thanking God once more. The best way for your child to learn how to pray is for them to hear you pray with them and for them. Let them hear you speak words of adoration and worship, confess your sins, make specific requests, and then thank Him again for listening and answering.

Table Talk

So much of passing along your legacy to your children will be found in the ordinary moments ... such as engaging in conversation around the dinner table.

One way to initiate good conversation is to ask two questions: "What was the happiest thing that happened today?" and "Did you have any sad moments today?" This always evokes interesting family talk. This is a good way to get the kids involved in the discussion.

Another way of focusing family talk with your kids is to ask them, "Did the Lord say anything special to you today?" This is a great idea. Help your children learn to keep their eyes and ears tuned for God's activity in their lives during the day, anticipating the time they could give a report to their family at dinner.

Sing Together

For thousands of years, Christ-followers have celebrated their friendship with God through the singing of hymns and spiritual songs. Profound lyrics set to beautiful melodies have provided instruction, comfort, and hope to millions of believers around the world for centuries. They're also a great way for you to teach your children the truths of the Christian faith.

And, of course, every Sunday morning we affirm with other believers our faith in Jesus Christ through the singing of hymns and praise songs. Singing together has played a vital role in the Christian faith, and music is a natural way for you to teach your children sound theology.

After your family sings a hymn together just two or three times, you'll be surprised at how quickly your children will have them memorized. Soon you'll hear them singing the words to themselves. You'll know that the words are sinking in their heart and building



their character. Imagine the pure delight of passing the love of hymns to your children and then, in turn, to their children. Can you imagine the fun of hearing your two-year-old grandchild singing as she washes her hands, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Connect with a Local Church

Another way you can teach your children to love and honor Christ is by taking them to church every week. There’s a kind of ecstasy about sitting together as a family and worshipping the God you love. Your child hears your voice singing and praying and it creates a bond with Christ, His family, and with you.

Church is the place where you and your children can gain a deeper knowledge of God’s Word in Sunday school and small group Bible studies. When they’re older, your children may sign up for a mission trip where God’s work across the world can be brought into sharp focus.

Your church is filled with other adults with whom your children will establish friendships. During those times when you and your children aren’t connecting as well as you should, these “free adults” will affirm what you have taught your kids. They’ll help to keep them solidly grounded in their walk with Christ.

Like “home base” when you were young and played hide-and-seek, your church is a safe place—a fortress, really—that has stood firm against centuries of all kinds of warfare—visible and invisible.

Jesus said, *“I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it”* (Matt. 16:18 NLT).

That sounds like a good place for you and your children to hang out, doesn’t it?

Passing on Your Faith

The best way to begin a conversation about your child’s need to receive the gift of God’s grace is to tell them about your own journey of faith. You can also remind them:



- How great and good their Heavenly Father is ... how dearly He loves them;
- How much they need Jesus to forgive them for things they do that displease Him;
- How Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave saves them from their sin and Satan's power over them and brings them into a lifelong friendship with God; and
- That God loves them so much that He wants to live in their hearts and take them to heaven when they die.

Praying to Receive Christ

Though we cannot accept salvation for our children, we can help them understand how to grab hold of salvation once they recognize their need for Christ and express their desire to come to Him. Some parents take their children through this step by praying with them something like this:

Dear Heavenly Father. Thank you for loving me. I know that I am a sinful boy and need you to save me. Thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for me and for raising Him from the dead. I receive your gift of forgiveness; thank you for your promise to live in my heart for the rest of my life. And thank you for listening to me when I talk to you and for the promise that you will take me to heaven when I die. Amen.

Whether you help them with the words or give them enough information so they can come to Christ with their own prayer, the important thing is that they sincerely speak words of gratitude, repentance, acknowledgment of God's grace, and acceptance and thanks for His promises.

Celebrate Your Child's Decision

If salvation is important enough to God that He asks His angels to throw a party, you can do the same. Consider celebrating when your child comes to Jesus . . . by making a phone call to tell grandparents or a special Christian friend; buying a new Bible and writing your child's name and "new birth date" in the front. You may want to let your child choose a special place for dinner—or his favorite meal at home. These are ways to make the experience memorable, setting it apart like you do the child's physical birthday.



Like the angels did when the shepherd found his lost sheep, the woman found her lost coin, and the waiting father welcomed his lost son, you can rejoice because the lost has been found. That's reason enough to celebrate!

What will be your legacy on behalf of those you love? Will you help them build a foundation of faith that will sustain them through the trials of life and take them into the better world beyond? Now is the time to introduce your children to Jesus Christ. That training should begin early and continue for as long as you have moral authority over them. May the Lord bless you as you fulfill this divine responsibility.

RELATED RESOURCES

[**Are You Praying With Your Children?**](#)

[**Grasping the Concept of Who God Is**](#)

[**6 Crucial Concepts for Your Child's Spiritual Development**](#)

[**When Teens Reject Their Faith**](#)

For over four decades, Dr. James Dobson has been America's leading authority and advocate for the family.

This material is excerpted from Dr. Dobson's book [*Your Legacy*](#) and Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth's book *How To Lead Your Child To Christ*.

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