

Helping Your Child Develop a Growing Relationship With Christ

Dennis and Barbara Rainey

In the sixth-grade Sunday school class that we taught, we would choose a class verse and ask everyone to memorize it. I would pay one dollar to anyone called on during the class who could recite it perfectly, word for word. This is the best verse we found to drive home to sixth graders the importance of making Jesus supreme in life: “He is also head of the body, the church; and he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything” (Colossians 1:18).

Does your child have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? If not, pray that God will grant you or others the opportunity to share the gospel. Without Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, no one will turn away from worshipping false gods.

But even with Christ in our lives, we all are tempted in the flesh to serve these bogus gods. That’s why your child at some point in his teen years needs to develop the following convictions:

1. **Jesus Christ must be my Savior and Lord.**
2. **Regular prayer must be a crucial part of my daily life.**
3. **I must be the same person in private that I am in public.**
4. **The Scriptures are God’s Word and serve as my daily guide.**
5. **Nothing is more thrilling than fulfilling God’s mission for my life.**
6. **I will pass on a godly legacy to the next generation.**

To build these convictions into the lives of our children, we have emphasized a number of key spiritual disciplines. Here’s what we’ve done with our family:

Prayer

Our approach to prayer at home has been to make it a part of daily life and events. Of course we’ve prayed at meals and bedtimes and with individual children when needs arise. We’ve prayed before tests and tryouts and trips. We pray for overseas missions we’ve been a part of, for requests that come through our prayer chain, and for everyone in the public schools our children attend. We’ve prayed as we’ve driven the children to school, and now that Rebecca is driving to school, we remind her and her sisters every day, “Don’t forget to pray.” We’ve also prayed during our family devotions in the morning before school.

Bible Study

Our children grew up hearing Bible stories since the time they were very small. For several years when we had preschoolers, we helped them learn verses from a Bible memory program. We’ve done some more formal Bible study with our teens in junior high and early in high school, but it’s been sporadic because of schedules.

You might want to try the *Experiencing God* Bible study, youth edition, by Henry Blackaby, or one of the Precept studies for youth published by Kay Arthur.

Young teens often don't feel the need to study the Bible by themselves in their own quiet time. We haven't seen our teens take much initiative until they reach high-school age. The desire for personal Bible study seems to come when they're on their own more and they see their need to develop their relationship with God, to learn what He's telling them.

We could have imposed more Bible study on our teens, but we really wanted them to see the value of a close relationship with the Lord modeled in our lives.

On a fairly consistent basis Dennis has gone through the book of Proverbs with each child in high school. This book has some of the best wisdom for life issues, such as how to make good decisions concerning the opposite sex, how to make right choices, how to work, and how to be a faithful and responsible steward of what God has given you.

Church

Participation in the life of a church is a must. Your children may not always agree. Our boys went through a time when they didn't want to go. Because they were also involved in other Christian youth activities, we told them they didn't have to participate in our church's youth group but that Sunday worship was not an option.

We also had to set standards for what they would wear to church. For a while the boys wanted to go to church in the sloppiest T-shirts and jeans. The girls have balked as well at dressing nicely on Sunday. We've compromised slightly because our church is fairly casual.

Sunday needs to be a special day for many reasons, the most important being the opportunity to participate in a formal time to worship the true God.

Mission

From early on, we let our children know that God has a special mission for their lives. He has gifted them with abilities, personality, and certain qualities that will help accomplish His plan. We want our children to know that it would be better to be the lowliest worker in the will of God than to be on the mission field just to please their parents—or for some other reason.

When Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission, He was in essence giving them a mission. Read His command and words carefully, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

How you send your child to junior high and high school is one of the most important strategic moves you'll ever make. A teenager needs a challenging mission. He needs a purpose that transcends the rush to follow the herd after the lesser gods of popularity, selfishness, etc.

As our children moved into their teenage years, we told them there were two ways to go to school: as a mission field or as a missionary. A mission-field teenager is peer dependent. A missionary teen seeks to reach out to his peers and help them find Christ. Mission-field teens go with the flow of the herd and the youth culture; missionary teens grow in character and conviction, because they are fighting the current.

One way to make Jesus' mandate to go into all the world practical is to become a fellow missionary with your child. Some years ago we began a family project of helping to start a Student Venture ministry on our teenagers' high school and junior high campuses. Student Venture is Campus Crusade for Christ's high school outreach, and we received plenty of help from its staff member as we stepped out in faith.

The benefits to our own family have been remarkable. We have found that involvement in a campus group like Student Venture creates a powerful sense of community for a preteen or teenager at school, the very place where negative peer pressure can be overwhelming. Our children have received vital spiritual support through the encouragement and prayer of fellow teenagers, as well as through the adult leaders.

We know that not every parent will start a ministry at their child's school as a way of developing a mission mindset in their children, but this helped us start our children thinking about those around them who are in need of a relationship with Christ.

Missions Trips

One of the best ways to instill a missions mindset in your child is to go together on a short-term mission, here in the United States or overseas. In addition to the impact you will have for Christ, you will find that your child will change in significant ways as he moves out of his normal comfort zone and sees the need that others have for Christ.

A year ago I (Barbara) took our three youngest daughters, Rebecca, Deborah, and Laura, on a two-week missions trip to Russia as part of Josh McDowell's Operation Carelift. We were a part of a group of more than 400 men, women, and children who gathered together in Moscow to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of the children of Russia. We went by the busload to schools, orphanages, and family centers to distribute boxes of food, medicine, clothes, and books—and to personally share the good news of Jesus Christ with children.

Our girls had the privilege of handing out good news bracelets and Bibles. Two of them gave the gospel presentation through our interpreter. It was an experience they will not soon forget. We all want to go back, because we fell in love with the Russian people and especially the children.

Our girls now have a far greater appreciation for what we enjoy in this country, and they have seen firsthand what life is like for people in another land. They have tasted both the sacrifice and the joy of being a missionary.

Conferences

One of the most effective tools we have used over the years is youth conferences. These events may only take a few days, but they can grow your child's faith, encourage him to make it his own, and give him a vision for reaching out to students at his school.

In addition to our church's excellent spiritual life conferences for youth, we've sent our children to a couple of other highly effective youth conferences.

"Something's Happening USA" is a youth congress organized by Student Venture. Attended by 1,000 teens from dozens of states, this prayer conference is held over the Christmas holidays and features some of the most outstanding Christian youth speakers and musicians of our day. Our children say this is by far the most spiritually challenging conference they've ever been to. For more information, call Student Venture at 800-678-5462.

"Mind Games" is a workshop organized by Probe Ministries to help teenagers develop a defense for their faith prior to college. Samuel attended this his senior year and wanted to go back the following year. This is a spiritually challenging retreat that gives these teens a head start on developing a God-centered view of life and world issues.

For more information write to [Probe Ministries](#), Mind Games Conference, 1900 Firman Drive, Suite 100, Richardson, TX 75081. Phone: 800-899-7762.



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