

Comfort for Christian Parents of Unconverted Children

Jim Elliff

All Christian parents wish that God would show us something to do that would secure our child's salvation, and then "we'll do it with all our might" because we love our child so much. Yet, God has not made salvation the effect of somebody else's faith; our son or daughter must come to Christ on his or her own. John shows us that all Christians are born into God's family "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, [that is, somebody else's will] but of God." (John 1:13)



Although salvation is the work of God and not something that we can do for our child, there is hope. Consider the following:

1. A true burden in prayer for your child is a gift from God. A persistent burden may indicate that God intends to give your child eternal life because authentic prayer always begins with God. Though we cannot be absolutely certain that we know all that God is doing, we should be optimistic if the burden continues.
2. The miracle of the new birth is no less possible to God if our child is attentive to Him or running away from Him. Our child is like all other children when it comes to God's grace. He is dead spiritually whether he is in church or not, whether he listened well to the truths we tried to teach him or did not, whether he has some interest in God now or has none at all. He may be converted in the pigpen or the pew and we do not know in each case what is preferred by God.
3. God does hear our prayers. Though God has taught us that He chooses all who are His before the foundation of the world, He also taught us that we should pray, and not only pray, but expect the answer to our prayers. It is true that God is sovereign and it is just as true that He answers prayer. In fact, He could not answer prayer if He were not in control of all things.
4. We may have hope because of God's election of those who will come to Him. Every child is on his way to hell unless God stops him. God's election is our friend. We would have no hope for our child's salvation without it, because no child would turn to Christ if left in the state of depravity (Romans 3:9-11). But given God's election of people for Himself, we can be encouraged.
5. Your child has some clear knowledge of what it means to be a true Christian. The Spirit certainly may bring this to bear at any time if this is His chosen method.

Though it is no less a miracle for a knowledgeable child to be converted than a child with little knowledge; God always uses the gospel seed in every conversion.

6. Your own disobedience in the past will not ultimately keep your child from becoming a believer. It is pointless to berate yourself for any wrong behavior on your part as if it were the reason your child is without Christ. This does not mean that we as parents should not repent and do better, and even admit wrong to our children. But the reason your child is without Christ is related to his or her own sin. *Every* parent is sinful and inconsistent. This has never been a barrier to God if He desires to save your child. Illustrations abound of children who come from far less godly families who are nonetheless converted to Christ. In fact, this may have been the case in your own experience.
7. Some children may need the experience of being away from parental care in order to face up to their own need for Christ. The sense of need for many may be discovered only in the context of difficulties. We should not be surprised if it takes some solo flying before a child learns that he or she really needs another as his pilot.
8. Remember that there are lots of people who have come to appreciate their history prior to coming to Christ. I'm not saying that these people would not have wanted conversion earlier, but that the pain of their pre-conversion history has left them with compassion, understanding, knowledge, testimony, and a burden that they would perhaps not have had any other way. They've seen God's wisdom in the timing of their conversion. This may well be so with your child. Paul said that there was a reason he was chosen to be converted even though he was a murderer, blasphemer and violent aggressor—so that people will see and have hope that God can save anyone.
9. You cannot save your child yourself no matter how hard you try. You are in a position of trust alone. This is good because it is the only way to please God (Heb. 11:6). Your rest in God, while simultaneously praying to the God who answers prayer will be an encouragement to others in the same situation. It will also help you respond to your child more positively, and will make your life far more joyful than your anxiety ever could.
10. Finally, remember that God has a purpose in all He does. We will one day rejoice that God has done a perfect job of ruling His universe. When we acknowledge this and put God even above our children, we will actually demonstrate to our child the way a Christian is to live.

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