

# The Godliest Parents

Jim Elliff & Steve Burchett

Are you the godliest person your child has ever known?

Too often, parents relegate the role of being a spiritual leader for the family to a youth pastor or a children's ministry worker, but biblically this should not be the norm. Deuteronomy 6 speaks of the parental responsibility to teach the Word of God "when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (v. 7).

In Ephesians 6:4 Paul instructed home-grown leadership when he said, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Children need godly parents much more than they need a spectacular children's or youth ministry.<sup>1</sup> The evangelization and discipleship of your child is *your* responsibility, and a main channel for conveying the gospel is the life you live before them.



Do you remember Timothy's mother and grandmother? The apostle Paul wrote about Timothy's "sincere faith . . . which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5). Later, in 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul stated, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, *knowing from whom you have learned them*" (emphasis added). Surely even more than Paul's example over a brief period (cf. 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; 3:10-11), it was Lois and Eunice that authenticated the message they proclaimed before young Timothy. They "practiced what they preached," and this gave their words a genuineness that Timothy could not deny.

Here's what we should learn: *If we want our children to hear the gospel from us, they must see the gospel's impact upon us.* How we live before them powerfully preaches the gospel and its implications for our lives.

How does this work out? If we tell our children that the proper response to the gospel is one of faith, then they should see us resting in the promises of God. Do they see you trusting God even when trials come? If you tell your child that following Christ is costly, is it costing you anything? We should tell our children that repentance is necessary for anyone who wants to be a

Christian, but are we repentant about anything? The Lord might use our godly behavior to have a saving effect upon our children. Also, we have the high privilege of modeling the character and perspective of God before our children. For example:

- *We model God's view of sin by our approval or disapproval of what we watch or listen to.* What do your children see you watching and enjoying on the television? Are your favorite shows consistent with God's character? And when that improper advertisement comes on television, have you ever noticed what happens? All eyes turn to dad or mom. Why?
- *We model God's judgment of sin by our consistent discipline of sin in the lives of our children.* We give children a taste of the judgment they would face apart from Christ when we obey God's Word and discipline them appropriately (cf. Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).
- *We model God's love for His own by our care for our children.* Do you serve your children? Do your children see you giving up your "free time" in order to help them with a project or listen to a story about their trip to the museum? To give and serve like this is to imitate God "who did not spare His own Son" (Romans 8:32) and Jesus who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- *We model God's view of what really matters in life with how we prioritize our family's schedule.* Sports have become a key competitor to the life of a church. Perhaps you find yourself at ball practice, instead of that important church meeting. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." The remedy is not to renounce sports, but to reprioritize your family's schedule so that your children will not look back upon their childhood and have to honestly say, "My parents served my sports schedule."

There is a direct connection between the way we live and our children's understanding of God and the gospel. Furthermore, we greatly impact the believability of the gospel when we affirm or deny it with our behavior.

[Adapted from a forthcoming book on childhood conversion by Jim Elliff and Steve Burchett]

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<sup>1</sup> There will be children in our churches who come from unbelieving families, and in these situations people in the church should be willing to stand in the gap that has been left by negligent parents.