

Striving to Prevent the Everlasting Misery of Our Children

Jim Elliff & Steve Burchett

Puritan Richard Mather (1596-1669), grandfather of Increase, and great grandfather of the early American leader, Cotton Mather, once imagined children on judgment day, speaking to their parents. His words serve as a sober warning that we must be diligent to care for their souls:

All this that we here suffer is through you. You should have taught us the things of God, and did not. You should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not. You were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never showed any competent care that we might be delivered from it. Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents; and woe unto you that had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.

If judgment day were tomorrow, would your children say that you did what you could to prevent their everlasting misery?

Doing What We Can Every Day

Moses reminded the Old Testament Jews that inculcation of truth into a child is a daily, and even hourly, responsibility:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up (Deut. 6: 6-7).

Some of what we can do for children will be best accomplished during those serendipitous moments of the day, when you least expect it. You have to be ready always. But such moments are not enough.

Though the means used to evangelize children will vary from one household to the next, parents *will* benefit from a disciplined approach. What follows are a few practical suggestions that you can implement in your home. These are not commands, but they are time-honored practices that God the Father has used in drawing children to His Son.

1. *Establish the practice of family worship.* Spend time together regularly as a family reading Scripture, singing, and praying. When the children are young, family worship should not be long or tedious for them. They will learn best by degrees. For some parents, family worship works best in the bedroom just before bedtime. This could be especially true for a parent with an unconverted spouse.

For others, a special time just following a meal (and before the dishes are gathered up) provides the perfect spot for a short but meaningful experience together around the Bible, prayer, and singing (if possible).

2. *Catechize your children.* A “catechism” is a collection of questions and answers that teach basic theology. Children will not immediately understand everything they are memorizing, but a good catechism will teach them the truth that is necessary to know for their salvation.
3. *Implement a plan of Scripture memorization.* Since Scripture is “able to give” our children “the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15), the memorization of verses, passages, and even books of the Bible should be a regular discipline in our homes.
4. *Utilize gospel literature.* There are so many Christian publications for children that it becomes almost impossible to recommend them by name. Carefully discern what is best to read yourself, however, since children will only read a few hundred books in their lifetime. One “world-class” book for your use is *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan, along with its children’s version, *Dangerous Journey*.
5. *Enjoy media resources.* But be very, very careful with this. Concerning a show or program that our children will watch, for example, we will need to ask, “Does this tell the truth about the gospel or not? Does it distort or trivialize the Bible?” Another question to ask is, “Is this an appropriate method for presenting such serious truths?”

Your children will stand before God in the judgment some day. What concerns us most is not what they might say about us, if that occasion arises, but what will be said to them.

Jesus once said that on that day he will declare to some, “I never knew you; Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:23)

The time to help your children face that day with confidence in Christ is *now*. Doing what you can for your children *now* is the supreme business parents are to be engaged in while there is time.

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