SYNERGY-CREATING FAMILY PRACTICES

When it comes to raising godly children, many factors are outside our control. Even so, there are several things we, as parents, can do that will go a long way toward reaching this goal. Dr. Larry Taylor, head of Prestonwood Christian Academy (Plano, Texas) and author of Running with the Horses, offers some insights here. —Dan

If I told you certain practices serve as predictors for whether children continue in their faith throughout adolescence and into adulthood, would that interest you? If I told you that you don’t need a theology degree to lead your family in these practices, would that encourage you? The practices I am referring to can be done in everyday life routines—if they are prioritized.

Luke 6:40 says, “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” This is a powerful biblical principle for parents; our influence on our children’s Bible reading, Bible study, and prayer is immeasurable. Such practices can be administered to some degree by other people; however, we are talking about reaching synergy levels—and there simply is no replacement for Mom and Dad.

The Luke 6:40 principle is that children will look like you—Mom and Dad! Multiple studies suggest that children’s observational learning may lead them to share their parents’ values, attitudes, and behaviors. Lee, Rice, and Gillespie (1997) studied how patterns of family worship relate to adolescents’ behaviors and beliefs, focusing on the vital role that parents play in the development of children’s belief systems. As parents, we must carefully consider our spiritual condition: that is, whether we look like Christ.

There are many practices embedded in the synergy-creating practices below, but these are the foundations. Notice that they all revolve around you. These practices are all about the dynamics of family—the relationships we develop with our children (Gunnoe and Moore 2002).

1) Communication and emotional closeness: how we communicate with our children through conversations that are interactive (not dominated by Mom and Dad); how our children perceive the depth of our unconditional love and support (even during discipline). Early research from Willits and Crider (1989) claims that exposure to the parents’ advanced moral reasoning is not enough to influence adolescents; a relationship with them is necessary. Our “sermons” are not as impactful if we haven’t bonded with our kids (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003).

2) Family rituals: daily, weekly, and annual routines. These relationship-building practices are prioritized in the midst of the busyness of life; they’re sacred spiritual times as well as informal, fun routines integrated into normal family life.

3) Parenting style: how we oversee and manage our children; our style and personality during daily interactions with children; how we motivate, encourage, monitor, discipline, and direct our children (Dudley and Wisbey 2000).

4) Dealing with conflict: the process we use when conflict hits. We must connect conflict to other practices, such as communication, in order to honor the principles of unity and peace while also dealing with opportunities for personal growth.

We all want our children to develop a relationship with Jesus and to live out their faith in the “marketplace.” These synergy-creating family practices will help create a congruent message across all the influencing agents of a child’s worldview: the core values present in the home, the church, the child’s peer group, and weekday educational programs. It begins at home with the Luke 6:40 principle.

With God at the helm of every area of our lives, we can do this, parents! As the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13 (NKJV), “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Larry

References


