

Training Our Kids to Work for God

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Introduction.

- A. This being the first Sunday of the month, it's time for us to return again to the topic of our service groups. I must say, friends, that I am delighted with what I've seen from this congregation in the past two months. Our leaders have done a great job of carrying out their responsibilities, the rank-and-file members have done everything they've been called on to do, and I think there's an overall excitement here about serving God. All of our workers should be commended for doing their part, and we need to keep after it.
- B. Part of what leaves me so impressed by this is that everyone who has participated has had to give something up to do so. More time given to the Lord means less time for relaxing in front of the TV, for pursuing our hobbies, and even for more important pursuits like our jobs and our families. That last point is perhaps the most challenging of all. We love our little ones, and we want to invest all the time we can in caring for them, yet we also recognize that Jesus said that whoever loves son or daughter more than Him is not worthy of Him.
- C. However, this tug-of-war for our time between our God and our children doesn't just have to be a struggle. It can be an opportunity as well. If we exclude our children from our service to the Lord, yes, a conflict exists, but if we include them, suddenly, the work we do for God becomes an important child-raising tool as well. I myself am the son of godly parents who have spent their lives doing good, and the way that I have always seen them constantly involved in service has shaped my perspective on service too. We all want our children to be involved in the Lord's work. Let's look at how. Let's look at training our kids to work for God.

I. Learning.

- A. As with all types of training, training our children to be useful to the Lord must begin with them learning what to do. Within that, the first step we need to take is to **TEACH THE WORD**. Perhaps the most significant statement about this in Scripture appears in Deuteronomy 6:6-8. There are many elements in this passage to which we must pay attention. First, notice where Moses says teaching our children must begin. It has to start with the word inside our own hearts. If we don't know the word and love the word, we will never be the teachers our children need. Second, pay attention to where Moses says the teaching should occur. The Bible must not be something we just talk about in church. It has to be something we talk about everywhere, just the way we talk about anything we love. That's the way to plant the word in the hearts of our children too.
- B. Also, when it comes to teaching the word, we must be careful to ensure that our discussion of the word reflects the content of the word. Sometimes, I fear the brotherhood has missed out on this. We've been so busy fighting against false doctrine and against worldly practices that we haven't spent as much time as we should projecting a positive vision for the church and its members. Now, don't get me wrong. We need to teach against institutionalism and other practices that subvert God's will. We need to teach against drunkenness and fornication and all other forms of immorality. However, our children need to hear too that being a Christian means being an imitator of Christ, not just of His purity, but of His service. Our children need to hear that God expects us to be useful in the kingdom, doing good both inside and outside of the church.
- C. I think we would all agree that this is a challenging message to get across, even in a family where both parents are committed to serving God. Sadly, however, many of our parents here, our mothers especially, don't have that blessing in their struggle to teach their children. Now, that's not something I've ever experienced personally, but I can imagine how hard it must be. I would suspect, in fact, that there's a terrible temptation to give up, to just throw up one's hands and say, "If they don't want to serve God, fine!" It's in times like those that we need to remember that raising a godly child by oneself is difficult, but it is possible.
- D. Along these lines, consider 2 Timothy 3:14-15. Paul clearly regards Timothy as well grounded in the truth, as a useful servant of God, but Timothy's father had nothing to do with it. As we learn elsewhere in Scripture, Timothy's childhood instructors in godliness were his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice. Those two faithful women were able to raise a son and a grandson who was dedicated to the Lord and useful for all kinds of service. So ladies, if you find yourselves in the shoes of Lois, if you're struggling to raise faithful children by yourself, take heart. If you patiently teach the truth to your kids, you may end up raising a Timothy.
- E. However, all the teaching in the world is pointless unless we also **PROVIDE A GOOD EXAMPLE** of service. It's not enough for us to tell our kids that they need to work for God. They need to see us doing it too. The greatest teacher of all time was Jesus, and He was very conscious of the power of a good example. Look, for instance, at the way He chose to teach in John 13:14-15. Jesus had been teaching His disciples for years that rather than seeking to be first in the kingdom of heaven, they should seek to love and serve one another. Yet even on the night of His betrayal, their squabbling about precedence made it clear that they hadn't gotten the message. Jesus knew that extreme measures were called for. Though the Master, He knelt to wash His disciples' feet, showing them by the example of His lowliness the kind of service He expected from them.

- F. We need to do the same with our children. There is probably nothing in their lives that will influence them as much as our example. If we want them to be workers for God, they need to see us out working for God: showing up for workdays, visiting the sick and shut-ins, greeting visitors in the assembly, and generally doing anything else the church needs us to do. Paul emphasizes the close link between teaching and example in 1 Timothy 4:15-16. In order to save himself and his hearers, Timothy had to think about the word, put the word into practice, and teach the word. Our children are counting on us to do the same for them. They need both godly teaching and godly example. Without the example, they'll dismiss our teaching as hypocrisy. Without the teaching, they won't really grasp that we're serving God at all. Let's do both, because our kids need both.

II. Doing.

- A. Helping our children learn about God is a process that will continue as long as we have them, but sooner or later, they will reach a point in their lives when they need not just to be learning, but doing. They need our help with that too. First, we need to **OFFER THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE**. If we've taught as we should up to that point, this is something that should begin to happen quite naturally. After all, the point of teaching IS doing. Consider with me the connection made between these two things in Ephesians 4:11-12. Paul tells us that Christ has provided us with all those different teachers so that we could be equipped to serve. That's the direction the entire New Testament is pointing. Love is the greatest virtue of all, but it's absolutely impossible to express love for our brother and our neighbor without serving them. If we've taught our children to love as they should, to bless all those around them, we have also awakened in them the hunger to serve.
- B. Once we've done that, we need also to feed that hunger rather than frustrate it. We should never discourage one of our young men from leading singing or leading a prayer or giving a talk. We should be eager to help our young women when they want to teach a children's Bible class. Even more than that, though, we need to encourage godly work outside of the assembly too. We need to lead our children to send cards or make phone calls to Christians who aren't at services. We need to take them with us when we go visiting. We need to have them doing their part in greeting and welcoming visitors. That's just the next step in teaching.
- C. In all of this, there's a tendency on our parts to worry about expecting too much of our kids, to want to shelter them from the full force of God's expectations. At times, there may be wisdom to that, but too much caution can be spiritually dangerous. Sometimes, we need to challenge them by putting them in a work they're not fully ready for yet and letting them grow into it. After all, the times when any of us grow the most are not when we're left alone, but when we're pushed. Even beyond that, though, the truth is that our young people are usually capable of far more than we believe. Along these lines, look at Paul's instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12. Likewise, the youngest Christians here have the potential to shine as examples to all of us. They may not have the wisdom that maturity brings, but they burn with the zeal of youth. We have two choices. On the one hand, we can frustrate that zeal by leaving it with no outlet. Ten years ago, it seemed that all the Christians my age I knew were frustrated by what they perceived as the lifelessness and inactivity of the church. There are plenty of younger Christians who feel just the same way today. On the other hand, we can take that zeal and channel it. We can put our young folks out there on the front lines, doing the work that God expects from every Christian. I am confident that if we do, they will do great things for God.
- D. If things continue in that way, soon, our children will no longer be content merely to do what we tell them to do. Instead, they will come up with ideas for things they need to be doing on their own. When that happens, we need to **ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT ACTION**. Parents and Christians generally don't necessarily do a good job at this. We become so used to the status quo that we regard any new ideas as challenges to the traditional norm. Instead of behaving like that, we need to learn from the example of Barnabas in Acts 11:23. Remember, at this point in time, the gospel had just been brought to the Gentiles. To Barnabas, the idea of Greek Christians must have seemed about as normal and natural as a talking dog. Nonetheless, despite whatever discomfort he may have had with change, he encouraged them to continue serving God.
- E. We need to be the same way. Of course, this doesn't mean that we should allow our children and our young people to do things that the Bible doesn't allow. At the same time, we need to be careful to not to bind what God has loosed, either. For instance, let's say that one of our young folks wants to collect a group of other Christians and spend a Saturday working for Habitat for Humanity. For many of us, there's some uneasiness at the thought of Christians working to help the non-Christian poor. However, as long as it's individual action without any church resources, that sort of help is something the Bible allows and indeed encourages. Let's not throw cold water on those expressions of zeal. Let's encourage and promote them instead.
- F. Ultimately, we need to encourage our children's spiritual independence in this way because their actions will determine our legacy. Along these lines, let's consider 1 Timothy 2:15. Paul's point is that even though a woman will never lead a church or preach a sermon, her memory can still be preserved through the deeds of her faithful children. To a lesser extent, that's true for all parents and indeed for all churches. Young people get enthusiastic about all kinds of things: saving the whales, or supporting a particular political party. Let's do better than that. Let's leave behind a generation passionately committed to serving Christ.

Conclusion. If you want to start serving Christ, there's no better day than today to begin.