

Leading Our Children to the Word

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When a new child comes into a family, he or she commands complete attention. There is so much to think about. Babies require constant care and yearn for an emotional bond. And along with the incredible joy from this new gift comes an awesome responsibility and duty to be good parents. It can be invigorating, and also overwhelming. Family systems and habits must adjust to new relationships and revised schedules. Fatigue and extra stress can lead to impatience and conflict. Unless we have a vision of the higher calling of parenting, the chore aspect can sometimes seem stronger than the delight.

When our lives are filled with earthly challenges, then we need a higher resting place for our thoughts. Only the Lord can give us that vision, and He does it through His Word. For the Word is the way we can come to know the Lord and receive His guidance. Through reading the Word, we can be lifted up into a better place, to gain perspective and renewed strength for this vital work. Within the pages of the Word we can find every hope, every despair and every reward that parents and children could possibly experience. Stories, poetry, and songs grace its text. But its beauty lies not so much in style or human interest. It is in its power to connect us with the Lord and the spiritual world. “Who, when he is reading the Word, does not think of God, of the neighbor and of heaven?” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 611).

By turning our thoughts to the Lord, the neighbor, and heaven, an important event happens. For by doing this we have broken the hold of our immediate concerns. And when we reflect on Divinely revealed truths, the Lord—ever so secretly—works to purify our loves. And, if we direct our actions to correspond to these truths, then our hearts, minds and lives can be permanently changed. Our family will thrive in both spiritual and natural ways. And we will discover the blessings of a growing confidence in the Lord as the true leader of our family.

At first glance, we adults might think that we are not part of the apparent audience for the Old and New Testaments stories and histories. It can seem like these do not relate to our lives. But wait. Notice how children love them. The Days of Creation speak in a universal language to children’s need for confidence in the simple truth that the Lord has created everything. And in all that He created, He “saw that it was good.” Moses crossed the Red Sea, not by himself, but as a hero, leading the Lord’s people to freedom. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down as Jehovah God showed His mighty power to conquer the enemies of those who have faith in Him. David slew Goliath, not for the thrill of violence, but because of his courage and trust in the Lord. Kings and prophets repeatedly suffered when they put themselves above God’s laws, and the same thing can happen to each of us. The Word’s lessons about life go on virtually forever. And when children are encouraged by their parents to learn these stories, they can show an amazing wisdom in grasping the profound truths hidden within them.

Yes, the Word has many uses for our children. Its moral lessons, and their resulting character development, give them a “leg up” toward becoming fine adults of integrity. Children who are raised in a home where there is respect for the Word and the Lord live in an intrinsic order that

can avoid blame and a sense of domination. The house rules are the Lord's rules, and they exist for everyone. And this same order prevails in heaven among the angels.

Speaking of heaven, children can play an important part in helping the angels by means of the Word. For we are told that "If the Word is read even by a little child, the Divine things therein are perceived by the angels" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2899). The spiritual world is indeed close to us and to our children. And our connection to the angels is an *interdependent* one, capable of creating lasting spiritual bonds far beyond anything that we are conscious of.

So how can we bring the power of the Word into our family's life? Simply sharing time with our children in family worship, in looking at Bible story pictures, or in going to church, can make a big difference. Reading something from the Word each day sets up wonderful patterns that can bear fruit for a lifetime. There is a saying that "old habits die hard." If this is true, then certainly it applies to good habits as well as bad ones. And good and true things learned and lived in early childhood tend to reemerge as adulthood dawns.

There is one other crucial factor that can shape our ability to lead our children to the Word. Much of our effect on our children is a result of our own spiritual state. Through staying in touch with the Lord by reading His Word even just a little bit, each day, the seeds of love and wisdom can gradually grow to maturity within us. And, when we, as parents, explore the spiritual or inner meaning of the Old and New Testaments, the very heavens themselves are opened for us. Everything the Lord has written in these texts *is written for us*. It is His way of speaking to us. If we are growing spiritually, then we are truly serving our children. And the Word is our guidebook on this path.

The uses of the Word are accommodated to every state we may be facing, at every age in life. A thought or a prayer based on the Word will be heard. Indeed, the Lord anxiously awaits our call for His presence, for He constantly desires to lead us to our heavenly home. And the Lord's Word not only gives us the true principles we need and a good plan for living, it touches us on the inside, in ways we may not even realize. No matter how exhausted or busy we may be, turning to the Word can speak to our souls, offering us comfort and inspiration.

So let us listen to the Lord's instructions about teaching His Word to our children and remember that we too, need the comforting wisdom that He gives us there. "You shall teach them [these words of mine] to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).