

Winning Our Kids' Hearts

Deut 6:4-9

- God wants our faith to come out of our mouths and be a part of our daily living.
- God wants our faith to be passed on to the next generation.
- God's expectation is that things learned in these formative years become the foundation for adulthood and personal faith.

- But a different pattern is emerging in modern America – a pattern whereby young people leave home and begin to reject the teaching of youth and the actions of their formative years.
- Usually this is painted as “finding yourself” – often as freedom from chains, often as picturing the people and thoughts of youth as worthless and misguided.
- Our culture encourages this, painting Christianity as dangerously backward and anti-intellectual. Scientists don't believe it, stars decry it, peers aren't living by it.
- And then there is the moral side – where culture presses the view that self-restraint is pointless, impossible, and needlessly frustrating. And the God of the Bible and the people who believe in him are so far away – and probably misguided anyway – that there's no point in holding back.
- The long and short of it is this – our kids are losing their faith.
- All of this is terrifying to me as a parent and a preacher of the gospel. It presents daunting prospects in our time.

- But – and this is key – the problem doesn't seem to be a problem of *information*. Our kids know what the Bible teaches and the essential points of the faith.
- The problem is a *heart* problem. They want to do something else, their hearts are elsewhere. So how do we win our kids' hearts for God? Want to discuss some things the Bible teaches us that we – as parents and brothers and sisters – can do to win hearts for Christ.

1) I must be sincere

- Deut 6:5-9 – I can't put God's words in *their* hearts if they're not in *mine*.
- If this really is my passion, I will talk about it, I will mean it, I will live by it. It will be how I treat people, how I talk at home, how I worship, and how I admit fault.
- There is a tremendous power in culture. What do the people around us do? Far more important than what they *say*. What does being a Christian look like? For our kids, that question will be answered by us.
- We cannot hope to win our kids' hearts without our hearts being won themselves.
- In studies and surveys of kids who leave church, there is always a big chunk who say it was due to hypocrisy – people who consistently say one thing and do another, don't live by the teaching. Hearts that are not in it.
- This is not just a parent point either (though it certainly is that). We all contribute to this bc we all add to our congregational sincerity quotient.

- 2 Tim 1:5 – Sincere (unfeigned) faith can be passed down. Paul sees an undeniable link here between Timothy's faith and that of his mother and grandmother.
- They were sincere and now he is too. How did that happen? Well, it's his choice, but it's a choice heavily pressured by what he's seen.

- 2 Tim 3:14-15 – Even as Timothy is grown and on his own, the sincerity of his mom and grandma *still* have an influence. Remember their character.
- That's what we're going for – and the key is our sincerity.
- This means that I can't hope to win my kids' hearts if there are huge moral failings in my life that go unacknowledged, uncorrected. Or if I act totally different at home than I do in front of others. Or if I show two faces – gossip as soon as I'm out of their presence. Or if I'm half-hearted in my belief. Or if I am requiring things of them (Bible study for example) that I'm unwilling to do myself.
- I must be sincere.

2) I must teach and discipline

- Eph 6:4 – This passage speaks to fathers about responsibilities toward their children. What is most urgent about our work?
- God's priorities are that we do not provoke them to anger – that we are careful and concerned about what's best for them, how they react to us, awareness of impact of our actions toward them. As parents, the constant look is toward what is best for them-and provoking them is not the goal.
- Discipline and instruction – first word speaks to training, instruction. Second involves verbal correction. Training, discipline, correction – careful not to provoke, but to gradually bring along.
- “of the Lord” – can mean teaching *about* Jesus – or it can mean in a way reflecting Jesus' spirit and priorities. Both are true and helpful.
- But I cannot win my kids' hearts without teaching and discipline.
- Here is where I marshal a number of passages that reinforce this point.
 - *“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother”* (Prov 29:15).
 - *“Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death”* (Prov 19:18).
 - *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him”* (Prov 22:15).
 - *“For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him”* (Gen 18:19).
- So the foremost application I see here for today is that if we're going to win our kids' hearts, we're going to have to be more than a buddy.
- Movement has been afoot for a generation or two – as a response to overly harsh parenting – to just be a friend, just listen, support. Teaching, discipline not a huge part of such strategies.
- Interesting that we're not the first generation to try that approach.
- *“And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them”* (1 Sam 3:13).
- *“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’”* (1 Kings 1:6).
- These passages point us away from that movement – to be a friend, sure, but someone must teach and discipline.
- And I will say – as someone who has done a lot of work with *others'* kids – there are opportunities for others to guide, counsel, teach, and express concern. Such people can sometimes have a bigger impact than parents, and parents will be grateful for the help.

- Deut 4:9-10—I would add that there is something powerful about this kind of teaching—teaching that is personal, real, and from experience.
- Our kids wanting to know “why” is not always bad—this can be folded into teaching and discipline.
- If we have an obligation to teach the gospel to the world, how much more our kids?

3) I must expect something of them

- God has expectations of young people—speaks directly to them about it
- Psalm 119:9—God expects young people to keep themselves pure—and he expects them to do it by paying attention to his word. That’s a high standard.
- Eccl 11:9-12:1—God sees and knows the excitement and joy of youth, but he also expects us to remember him while we’re young. He expects us to make choices that reflect his priority while we’re young.
- 2 Tim 2:22—There are some passions that are more characteristic of the young and God expects young people to flee them and pursue good things.
- Expectations are tricky. If we expect kids to be perfect, we discourage them and pave way for hiding, avoidance. But if we expect them to make lots of mistakes, we encourage them not to take their choices too seriously (at least not *yet*).
- If I want to win my kids’ hearts, I should expect them to live above the world, to understand that people don’t set their standard.
- If I want to win my kids’ hearts, I don’t expect perfection, but honesty.
- If I want to win my kids’ hearts, I hold them responsible for effort and recovery.
- Winning our kids’ hearts means that they know we love them no matter what—but that we expect them to be their best selves because we love them.

4) I must answer their questions

- Deut 6:20-25—Moses describes a situation where kids are asking questions. Do you think he knew some kids?
- Kids ask lots of questions—they are seeking information, trying to make sense of the world—and Moses is teaching the fathers of Israel that their responsibility is to answer their questions.
- And I want you to notice that the response the fathers are to give is a great explanation—history, God, why the LORD commands things.
- It is a deeply emotional response—not intended to be a dry intellectual exercise.
- Brethren, we cannot be brainless about our faith. That was never God’s intention. And sometimes it is the questions—especially the questions of our kids—that reveal how little we’ve been thinking about what we’re doing and why.
- *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”* (1 Pet 3:15).
- People are going to ask and God wants us to be prepared to answer.
- The problem I’m getting at—one these passages address—is the problem of us being frightened of questions and doubts, especially in our kids. We feel threatened by them—or we treat them as if they are of no consequence. God shows us that questions are the *best* teaching opportunities!!!

- Have you ever said “young people just aren’t interested”? Guess what—*questions come from interested people!!*
- So as a parent, I can’t get upset when my kids have questions.
- I need to listen honestly. I need to give more than a pat answer. This is a time for heart connection—here is the Bible, here’s what I think. I need to show honesty, integrity, thought, true listening.
- *As a church* we need to foster an environment where questions are welcome, where we test all things, where we are always *seeking truth*. Those who are older had questions when they were younger—and now it is our privilege to help those younger work through some of the same problems and questions.
- And our kids do have questions. Challenging questions.
- Young people are leaving the Lord and the church because of questions about homosexuality, premarital sex, science. They think it’s boring, exclusive, old-fashioned. They have really difficult questions about the Bible—are there errors, contradictions, is it inspired and how did that work, has it been properly translated.
- If we are unwilling to answer those questions, what do we think will happen? If we won’t answer them, someone will—and in the meantime, our kids will learn that we don’t know why we believe.
- Over the coming months I want to address these topics at different times to give some answers, passages, and approaches to help in this. But don’t want on me. Answer!
- Our kids don’t have to lose their faith! Not destined to happen, not certain. Let’s win them over for Christ!