

How Do You Teach Godly Principles to Your Children?

“Because I Said So!”

Every parent has life principles and skills that they want their children to possess. We want our children to be responsible, organized, loyal, hard working, honest, self-disciplined, polite, respectful, godly etc . . . and yet many of us come up short in understanding HOW we are supposed to instill all, or any for that matter, of these characteristics in our children. Sadly, our desire as parents to instill godly principles simply does not come naturally equipped with the ability to make it happen.

“!!!!!!BECAUSE I SAID SO!!!!!!” This glorious parenting phrase is often the most compelling motivation and method we use to instill principles and skills in our children’s lives that we would like them to possess. Parent’s who have the best intentions often are only able to muster “because I said so” for how to get their children to do what we would like them to do. Our busy and hectic lives seem to leave little room for any more meaningful interaction with our children than “because I said so”. We may not always verbalize this phrase but “do what I say, or else!” is often in the heart and attitude with which we parent. Have you found this to be true in your parenting? This motivation and method is almost always accompanied with anger and frustration which only heightens the problem.

Is this the motivation and the method that we want to use to get our children to live out the principles and skills that we want them to possess? Is this the greatest teaching tool that we have? Is this how God intends for us to pass on deeply important principles of life to the next generation?

Obviously, there’s got to be a better way.
So, how do you teach godly principles to your children?

The WHY Before the HOW

In Deuteronomy 6:1-9 God gives to Moses and the people of Israel His expectations of how godly principles were to be passed down from generation to generation. Immediately following God giving the Ten Commandments He tells how His commandments (principles) were to be woven into the heart of a human being.

Take a few minutes to read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. A few quick observations about God’s commands before we consider how we are to teach them to our children . . .

- 1. The principles are from God** (vs 1). *God* commanded Moses to teach *His* commands to the people of Israel. God himself and His perfect and holy character are the standard from which all the principles that He established originate. As we instill principles in our children’s lives we need to keep in mind that we are introducing them to the great “Principle Maker”!
- 2. The principles are to be lived out** (vs 1). God did not just give His commands as helpful suggestions or information, but as *the* standard which is to be obeyed and lived

out by His people. Children need to understand that these principles are the “instruction manual” of how God designed and desires their lives to be lived out and most fully enjoyed.

3. The principles are to inspire fear of the Lord (vs 2). Proverbs 1:7 says, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. God deserves our most sincere reverence and respect because He is the *ultimate* authority. Children need to understand that we live by God’s commands because of His rightful position of authority above all of His creation.

4. The principles are to bring a blessing (vss 2-3). God promises abundant blessing to those who love and are obedient to Him. Prosperity and life are blessings that we receive as we do God’s commands. Children need to understand that there are physical, but primarily spiritual, benefits that God grants when we live according to His commands.

5. The principles are lived out based on a love for the one true God (vss 4-5). Deut. 6:4-9 is considered in Jewish tradition to be the great “Shema” which means to “hear” or “listen”. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus affirmed this truth by saying that “loving the Lord” is the greatest commandment. Children need to understand that our primary motivation to be obedient to God’s commands is a whole-self love for Him.

6. The principles are to be on the parent’s heart first (vs 6). The greatest teacher of God’s commands is one who loves Him and has His commands written on their heart. We cannot lead a child to a place that we have never been ourselves. Children need to understand that God’s principles are first and foremost in our hearts and they can learn from our example.

How To Teach Godly Principles

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 provides 4 Biblical ways to teach Godly principles to our children. The key to the success is that they need to be the lifestyle of your family. As you read each one consider how you can make it a regular part of your family life.

1. TEACH God’s commands into your child’s heart – Children need to be given frequent and accurate instruction about the principles that God has given in His Word. In our culture it is the norm to teach by simply giving information. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for teach has the nuance of to “pierce” or to “sharpen”. God’s commands are intended to be more than just information stored in the brain, but are to pierce the soul. Hebrews 4:12 says, “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” A practical way to teach godly principles is to provide opportunities for your children to put what you have been teaching them into action. Piercing a child’s heart is not done through the brain but through experience. After teaching your child about servanthood, give them an opportunity to serve. After teaching your child about the great commission, encourage

them to share the gospel with a friend. Experience will move your child's head knowledge to heart knowledge.

2. TALK about God's commands during all of the daily activities of life – Godly principles are not just taught, they are caught in the every day experiences and conversations of life. Multiple conversations about God and his commands need to be woven into the daily fabric of your family. A practical way to teach godly principles is to engage our children in regular “God Talk”. Very simply, “God Talk” is bringing God into everyday conversation with your child. When you talk about school, friends, activities, games, life events, decisions that need to be made, etc. it is important that we bring God into the discussion. During a “God talk” ask some simple questions like, “what does God's Word say about that?”, “How did you see God working in that situation?”, or “What did you sense God leading you to do/say?” During a “God Talk” we are reminding our children about God's presence in our lives and the commands that He wants us to live by. Deuteronomy is saying that these “God Talks” need to be a normal part of life. If “God Talks” are only reserved for major moments and decisions in life we will miss out on many of the most important opportunities to teach our children godly principles. “God Talks” will help your children apply the godly principles you are teaching them to their daily lives!

3. BIND God's commands to them wherever they go – Many traditional Jews wear a *phylactery* which is a small box containing portions of Scripture bound on their forehead and/or forearm. The point is that they want to physically keep God's commands with them wherever they go. We cannot be with our children everywhere that they go and so God's commands need to go with them. A practical way to bind God's commands to your children is to help them memorize Scripture. Simply memorizing ONE Scripture per month during a child's upbringing they will have memorized nearly 150 verses of Scripture. Could you recite that many verses? By memorizing Scripture slowly over a long period of time they will retain it for a lifetime and not just forget it in 5 minutes. The whole point is to bind God's commands permanently to their heart. Memorizing Scripture will bind Godly principles to your children's heart so that they go with them everywhere they go!

4. WRITE God's commands on a prominent place in your home – Many traditional Jewish homes have a *mezuzah*, a small scroll-shaped container, on the doorpost of the entrance to their home. When a family member or guest crosses the threshold of the home they are reminded that God and His commands are central. For our children, the home should be a place where God is central and His commands are “written” into the everyday fabric of their lives. A prominent place to write God's commands into your home life is to have a regular time and place for family worship. First, pick a time whether in the morning, during a meal time, or before bed, when your family can gather together and worship God. Secondly, pick a location where the family will gather that visually focuses on God's Word. A family altar (ie a chalkboard on the kitchen wall) is a great place to write God's commands that the family is studying, memorizing, and focusing on together. Family worship will present ongoing opportunities to instill godly principles into the lives of your children!

Minimum Daily Requirements

Your child's journey from age 4 to 18 is extremely important and very short. Christian parents need to intentionally put God into each day during this impressionable time. Here are some minimum daily requirements you should be doing in order to be teaching your children godly principles.

1. Spend time together reading and studying GOD'S WORD in order to know God and His commands
2. Spend time together communicating with God through PRAYER in order to discern His will
3. Spend time in CONVERSATION with your child about how they displayed love for God (obedience)
4. Spend time surrounding your child with regular REMINDERS of who God is and His commands.

Now go out there and do it . . . because GOD said so!!