

LEADING MY KIDS TO JESUS

BY J.D. GREEAR



HERITAGE AT HOME

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As a father of four young children, I have often reflected on the best way to lead them to faith. I want their decision to follow Jesus to be significant, but I also don't want them to go through what I went through. I know that when you present kids with a "Don't you want to be a good girl and accept Jesus and not go to a fiery hell?" of course they say, "Yes." "Praying the prayer" in such a situation may have little to do with actual faith in Christ and have more to do with making Daddy happy.

For that reason, many parents don't want to push their child to make a decision for Christ. What if we coerce them into praying a prayer they don't understand, and that keeps them from really dealing with the issues later when they really understand it? Might having them pray the prayer too early on inoculate them from really coming to Jesus later, giving them false assurance that keeps them from dealing with their need to be saved?

I understand that fear. At the same time, I know that children are capable of faith. (In fact, Jesus tells adults that for them to be saved they must become like children, not vice versa!) And Jesus says that those of us who make it difficult for little kids to put faith in Him ought to have a millstone tied around our necks and be thrown into the sea (Matt. 18:1-6). So I don't ever want to discourage my kids from faith.

The dilemma is resolved, however, by seeing salvation as a posture toward Christ and not as a ceremony. There is only one posture ever appropriate to Christ: surrendered to His Lordship, and believing that He did what He said He did. From the very beginning of their lives, I want my kids to assume that posture!

Why would I ever want them to have a different posture toward Christ? The opposite of believing is unbelieving; the opposite of surrendered is rebellious. So I teach my children, all along the way, to be surrendered toward Jesus and believing of what He said He accomplished.

I explain to them often what Christ has done and encourage them to pin their hopes of righteousness on His work and not theirs. Whenever they think about their hopes for heaven, I want their minds to go to what Jesus did on Calvary. And from the first time I began to speak to my kids about Jesus, I presented Him as Lord. It was literally the first thing I whispered in their ears when they were born. Over the years I have told them that if they would trust in Christ's finished work as their own, and follow Him as Lord, they would be saved.

But what if they don't really grasp all that salvation entails? What if they don't really know exactly why they are leaning upon Him, why they need His grace? Certainly, as my kids grow older, they will have moments of insight in which they understand better His grace, and defining moments in which they "own" their posture toward Him. But it is a posture I can encourage them toward from the beginning. Again: only one posture is ever appropriate toward Christ: repentant and believing.

To be honest, I'd even be OK if they ended up not knowing the precise moment they "received Christ." What a great evidence of the grace of God to be able to say, "For as long as I can remember, I have recognized the Lordship of Jesus and believed that He did what He said He did."

Children that grow up in unbelieving homes will likely have a memorable conversion to Christ where they pass from darkness to light. But I want my kids to grow up in the light. Personally, I'd prefer they NOT have an "exciting" testimony that involves years of rebellion, foolishness, and unbelief. I want each of my kids to have a nice, "boring" testimony; to be kids who spend their whole lives enraptured with what God did for them in Jesus. If and when they do have a season of rebellion, I'll pray for a dramatic conversion, or rededication, or whatever you want to call it. But for now, I pray they'll always look toward our Savior in submission and faith.

The bottom line: It's never too young to begin trusting in and surrendering to Jesus.

The gospel has been announced! Jesus has summoned the whole world to repent and believe. That includes our children. I want them to obey *today*.

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