

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

April 2016

Why We Teach Our Children to Be Christian

By: Jason Helveston



Before my wife and I put our children to sleep, we sing a song and pray.

Recently, they started picking up our routine. My daughter sings along. My son mumbles noises shaped like the melody. They slightly bow their heads and say amen. I'm fully aware they are mostly unaware of the details and depth of the Christian faith woven through the song and prayer. But they are picking up on something.

We sing "Come Thou Fount." Aspects of the song are loosely based on a passage in 1 Samuel. It reads, "Samuel took a stone ... and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'Till now the Lord has helped us'" (1 Samuel 7:12). This

whispers one of the largest themes in Scripture — God rescues his people.

An Ebenezer stone was a "stone of help." It was meant to foster belief in current and future generations. And as God rescued people in Samuel's day, he has rescued my wife and me. Now we haven't put a stone in the middle of Chicago, but we have stories commemorating our own spiritual liberation — stories we are compelled to share with our children, beginning with song and prayer.

Sharing Faith with Your Children

I wonder what future generations thought about Samuel's stone. I imagine some were drawn to consider God's faithfulness. Others, I'm sure, were less impressed. Perhaps they reasoned that it represented one person's or one group's thoughts and experiences of the divine, but that's all. The story was isolated for a particular people for a particular time.

Today it seems many people think this way. For

example, when some of our friends ... hear that my wife and I are raising our children to know the Bible, love Jesus, be a part of church community, and pray to God, we get mixed reviews. Since I'm a pastor, we often get a sort of "it figures" look followed closely by a subject change. Other times — when I've had the opportunity to enter into a richer conversation — I've heard many respond differently.

With respect, they have shared with me their hesitation to teach their own children their specific faith (or faiths or lack thereof) because they want their kids to choose their own path. Essentially, what I hear them saying is their Ebenezer stone is *their* Ebenezer stone. Their religious experience and beliefs are customized just for them.

I think I understand a bit about where they're coming from. As parents, we don't want to manipulate our children. We don't want to coerce them. We don't want our kids to be-

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come a Christian, Mormon, Buddhist, Scientologist, or whatever just because we are. We want them to have a genuine spiritual journey and experience.

However, I think unwittingly this progressive concept of faith and spirituality has pulled the rug out from under faith as a whole. Our collective intention has been to give equal credence to every single faith, religion, and worldview. However, by truncating faith and limiting its effects to the individual, we have actually belittled faith as a whole. By telling our children all faiths are possible and powerful and personal, we have also told them that no faith is really true.

That means when we invite our kids to choose their own path, we are assuming no path leads to ultimate reality. And if as a society we have decided that no religious disposition leads to reality, we have, in fact, enforced a disposition upon everyone, to believe just that — no faith is actually real or true or supreme. When we tell our children it's up to them to decide, in actuality, we've only left one option on the table.

But why don't we feel the same way about letting our toddlers play in the street? Why don't we feel this way about our kids sharing their toys or eating quinoa? Why don't we let our kids choose their own path at bedtime, or when they turn sixteen which traffic laws they want to follow?

In all of these areas, we are happy to tell our children what we think and share what we've experienced and even instruct them to follow our path, trust our experiences, and listen to our voice.

I think the difference is our concept of reality. Since we often think religious faith doesn't bear much weight on ultimate reality (only our own), spirituality has been relegated to a customizable buffet line of sorts. It has become viewed as a practice that is assumed to be so tailor-made for the individual that corporate training, teaching, and childrearing is deemed illogical, if not cruel and manipulative. But it weighs on me that God really saved Israel or he didn't. God really saved me or he didn't. God will really save my kids or he won't.

Why We Sing and Pray

And that's why we sing. That's why we pray. That's why I tell them how Jesus rescued me. That's why I tell them I still need Jesus and his grace everyday. That's why we tell them the story of Jesus in all we do and say and watch on Netflix. The only way my kids' faith in anything will ever be real is if I communicate that faith as a vision of reality, not mere sentimentality.

Bedtime is one Ebenezer stone my wife and I want to leave for our children. It's a time of peace and love we hope will point them to the ultimate peace and love of Jesus. But at the end of the day, they will need an experience of their own. After all, Israel wasn't going to win the next battle just because God helped them win the last one. Another stone would need to be laid down for each subsequent generation.

The Lord has helped us. And he will also need to help them. I hope that's what my kids are picking up on. That's what I'm praying.

[Used with permission from desiringGod.org, March 2016]

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