

## Parental Mythbusting

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Colossians 3:20–21

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Myths—they intrigue, entertain, and sometimes even humor us. From health and history to sports and science, myths and misconceptions seem to find their way into every realm of human thought and activity—including parenting.

As Christians, we probably dismiss most of the parenting myths we encounter without a second thought, *right*? After all, we're *Christians*, those who look to and depend upon God's Word to determine our reality, not worldly platitudes or cultural traditions. If you're among those who think only naïve and untaught Christians fall for unbiblical substitutes when it comes to parenting, maybe you'd better take a look at our list.

Here are ten of the most common myths confronting Christian parents these days. Mom and dad, as you endeavor to raise your children to the glory of God, take note of them:

### Myth # 1: "Children must be the *first* priority in our family."

Heard that one? According to this myth, the child-centered family is the successful family, so the more attention you give your children, the better they'll turn out. Basically, you've got to prioritize your children *over* your spouse. No matter how pious they make it sound, it's not pious at all. The Bible says your *spouse* is your priority, second only to God. Husbands, you understand this . . . God commands you to love you wife as your own body (Ephesians 5:28). Why? Because you're in a "one flesh" relationship with that woman (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). There is no such relationship between parent and child; it's a different level of intimacy. To elevate the relationship with your children above the more intimate relationship you have with your spouse isn't positive in any sense. It's a subtle but dangerous myth that always weakens and sometimes wrecks a home. Beware.

### Myth # 2: "I should rely mainly upon the church—particularly the *children's ministry*, to teach the Bible to my children."

Most of us would probably deny believing this myth, but how we live tells all. Evaluate your habits at home, parents. Where does the majority of your children's spiritual instruction take place—church or home? Who provides that instruction—an Awana leader or you? We're not belittling the role of your local church's teaching ministries. We are pointing out that Sunday school and youth group should supplement your teaching at home, not replace it. Both the Old and New Testaments assign *parents*, not pastors, the responsibility of teaching their children (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

### Myth # 3: "The *behavior* of my children is a sure measure of successful parenting."

That statement would cease to be a myth with a slight adjustment: Your *response* to the behavior of

your children is a sure measure of successful parenting. See the difference? Your child's behavior is mostly out of your control; your response is not. None of us, especially after the early years, can control our child's behavior. But you can and *must* control your response to their behavior. God's simple instruction to parents is found in Ephesians 6:4, "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Your success as a parent relates to how faithfully you carry out that charge, not how well your children receive discipline and instruction.

**Myth # 4: "*Quality* time with my children is more important than *quantity* time."**

Some parents use this myth to ease their guilt for spending too little time with their kids. That's not the biblical model. When God instructed parents to impart His Law to their children, notice how much time is involved: "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:6, 7). We're mistaken to think we can somehow schedule those teachable moments into a few scattered, "quality" interactions between dinner and dessert. Faithfulness to the parenting task requires more time than that. As you make yourself available, you'll begin to see how many unplanned opportunities arise out of those times of sitting, walking, lying down, and rising up.

**Myth # 5: "My children belong to *me*."**

Behind this myth is the false notion that, "My children are *my* property, and it's my right to raise them as seems best to me." Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold, children are a gift from the Lord." Even life itself is a gift, isn't it? But it still belongs to God. Parenting is a stewardship, and we are stewards of all God's gifts, including our children. We provide care, impart instruction, and teach them to fear God, and one day we'll give an account to Him for how we carry out our charge. Children belong to *God*.

**Myth # 6: "My *wife* should take responsibility for training our children since I work."**

Husbands, don't turn God's calling for your wife (Titus 2:4-5, to love you and your children, and keep the home) into a fatal parenting myth. God's instruction to your wife doesn't excuse you from parental responsibility. Scripture presents parenting as a joint-effort, and it also issues several commands directly to you *fathers*—it's *your* responsibility to train your children (Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21). It's true, your wife will spend more time at home with the kids while you work, but that doesn't eliminate or diminish your responsibility to join her—in fact to *lead* her—in the parenting task.

**Myth # 7: "My children won't be able to understand spiritual truths until they are *much older*."**

Biblical history, human history, and common experience demonstrate how young children can comprehend spiritual truth. Remember the prophet Samuel, or the young king Josiah? Samuel's close relationship to the Lord began at a very young age (1 Samuel 2:26), and king Josiah instigated spiritual revival in Judah when he was only a teenager (2 Kings 22:1; 2 Chronicles 34:33). In 1735, during the American Great Awakening, God saved Phebe Bartlet, a young girl in Jonathan Edwards's congregation, when she was only 4 years old. Parents and pastor alike thoroughly examined her comprehension of gospel truth and found clear evidence that she was born again. Time proved the genuineness of her profession. One of her favorite activities was attending church to hear the preaching of her pastor, Jonathan Edwards (not a theological lightweight). Don't fool yourself

parent—and certainly don't try and fool your children. They are sharper than you think.

**Myth # 8: "If I spank my children, it will *exasperate* and *provoke* them."**

Sadly, this myth is alive and well in many Christian homes. It intimidates parents and spoils children. Contrary to our anti-spanking culture, Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Truth is, if you want to provoke and spoil your children, just continue to shelter them from the painful consequences of disobedience (Proverbs 29:15). No kid loves a spanking, and we don't like discipline either, do we? But the writer of Hebrews tells us that discipline yields peaceful, productive fruit (Hebrews 12:5-11). (Here are a few other Scriptures to counter this insidious myth—Prov. 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; 29:17).

**Myth # 9: "Spanking my children is the *key* to successful biblical parenting."**

For some of you, spanking your child seems quicker, easier, and more effective than the relentless dawn-to-dusk instruction called for in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (see Myth #4). Ephesians 6 also calls for "discipline," but Paul clearly has more in mind than spanking. The positive command, "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4), refers to the systematic training and instruction of children. Literally, the word "instruction" could be translated "putting in mind." As a parent, you want to impart the knowledge of God regularly and lovingly to your child under the guidance of Scripture. *That* is the key to successful parenting. Spanking is just one part of that larger task.

**Myth # 10: "If I teach my kids properly, God *promises* they'll eventually turn out well."**

No doubt you've heard this myth. It's a popular interpretation, and *application*, of Proverb 22:6—"Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." How many times have you seen a parent cling to that verse in desperation as they watch defiant children forsake all they were taught? Some children sit under loving, prayerful instruction from their parents, only to later shame them with a scandalous lifestyle. It's heartbreaking, isn't it. But Solomon's proverb is not meant to be a gilt-edged guarantee your child will eventually trust Christ and live righteously. Solomon is simply saying early training usually secures lifelong habits. It's a charge to give great care and consistency to how and what you teach your children. God promises to bless *us* for parental faithfulness, but that doesn't necessarily mean our children will be saved. They have their own relationship with God to work out.

Parents, we'd like to hear from you. Have you detected some of those myths? Have you managed to dodge them, or have you tripped over a few? What *other* myths would you like to add? Let us know in the discussion thread below.

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