

Positive Parenting
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Marilyn Sharpe

IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Ben, age five, was at the breakfast table with his dad, when he blurted out, “Let me get this straight. We get up in the morning, brush our teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast, go to school, come home, eat dinner, brush our teeth, say prayers, and go to sleep. Is that all there is?”

How would you answer Ben? Here is what I hope he heard: “No, Ben, that isn’t all there is!”

I hope that Ben is surrounded by faith parents, Christian adults who journey with him, support him and his family in living those baptismal promises. Several years ago, I heard Kenda Creasy Dean, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, speak about what our children need from us ... from all of us.

- A creed to believe in
- A community to belong to
- A call of their own
- Hope for the future

What would this mean in your life with the children you love?

- Tell them in your own words what you believe about the Creator God, who made them and all that exists, who created them in God’s image, and claims them in baptism; about Jesus, sent to be God’s love in the world and who will stop at nothing to love them now and forever; and the Holy Spirit, given at baptism, that stirs up faith in them every day of their lives, giving them the power to follow Jesus.
- Knit them into a faith community, where children are known, loved, supported, and encouraged, giving them a robust sense of belonging.
- Name the gifts God has given each child, guiding the child to use them to bless others. God gifts and calls all of us to meaningful, purposeful work in God’s world.
- Give them hope for the future. In an ecologically fragile world, in which violence and economic disaster threaten, our kids aren’t sure there is a safe world in which they will grow up. Can we be hope-bearers for the children, echoing the words of Jeremiah 29:11? “Surely I know the plans I have for you said the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Provide a “wardrobe” of children’s Bibles, that are developmentally appropriate for all of the ages and stages. Tell them the stories of God’s love. Help them find themselves in God’s story and God in their story.

Introduce them to faithful people of all ages. Give them the opportunity to hear the faith stories of others. Listen to the stories and insights and wonder of the children. Remember, they have been sent to teach us, too. Jesus was not simply being tolerant and kind, when he told the disciples to let the children come to him. Jesus laid his hands on the children, blessed them, and declared that unless we become like this little child, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Do service together with the children you love. This is vitally important to help children have a sense of purpose and meaning, to love others as they have first been loved by God. Let them help at home and call it “service.” Let them care for God’s beautiful world. Let them practice compassion for others. Then, talk about service as they way we love God back.

Now, it is your turn to say, “No, that’s not all there is. You are vitally important in God’s world.”

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Read a Bible story together. (Children’s bibles count!) Ask, “What do you think God is telling us in this story?” Wonder together.
2. Pray for a friend who needs God’s love and care.
3. Spend time with your family elders this season. Ask them to share what difference it has made that Jesus is in their lives. Let your children hear these family stories of faith.
4. When a child is sad and discouraged, listen, listen, listen. Let the child know you believe they will have a wonderful future and assure them you will walk with them.
5. Name the gifts God has given them to share with others - welcoming others, caring for pets, sharing toys, compassion when another child is sad, a sense of humor, a strong body, a quick mind. Help them find opportunities to use their gifts for others.