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SHAPING YOUR CHILD'S WORLDVIEW THROUGH A LOVING RELATIONSHIP

BY JOSEPH KIDDER AND KATELYN CAMPBELL WEAKLEY

“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.” Mark 10:15,16¹

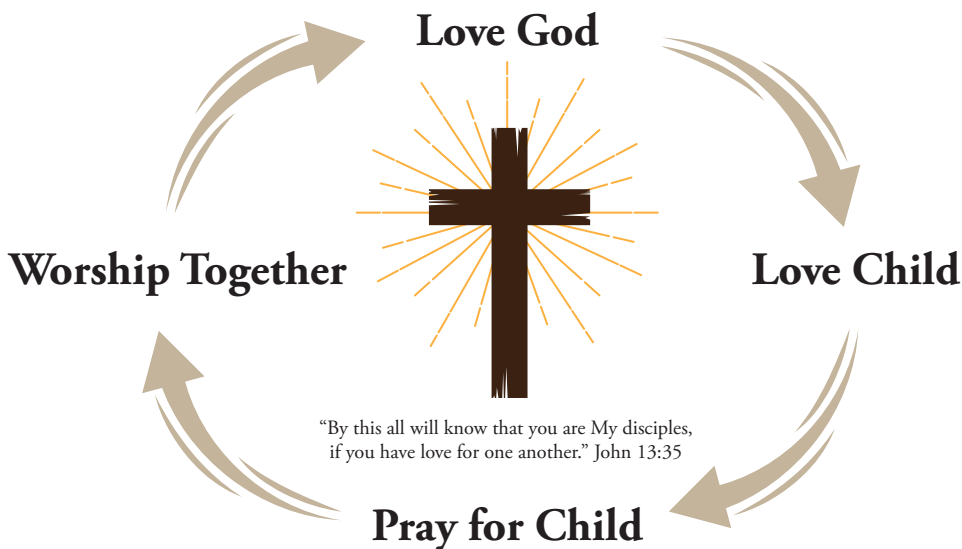
Childhood education is of the utmost significance for forming lifelong patterns and character. Ellen White knew just how important a child’s early years are for developing their life trajectory. “Too much importance cannot be placed upon the early training of children. The lessons learned, the habits formed, during the years of infancy and childhood, have more to do with the formation of the character and the direction of the life than have all the instruction and training of the after years.”² In order to instill a positive Biblical worldview in your children to last a lifetime, it is essential to train them when they are young.

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Your child's worldview is what is going to help orient him or her in life. The worldview that your child develops will answer key questions for them: Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is real? What is right and wrong? Who is God? All of these questions and more are answered by the worldview your child develops, shaping his or her outlook and basic assumptions. No decision is made without a worldview. To make positive, healthy decisions, a child needs a positive, healthy worldview. A Biblical worldview is based on Scripture and can help children make intelligent decisions that will honor God and benefit others as well as themselves.

This article will discuss important principles and practical methods for developing a Biblical worldview in your child through loving God, loving the child, praying for the child, and worshipping together. You will note that this process is all rooted in love, which is the mark of the followers of Christ. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). If we are to train up children to be disciples of God, we must demonstrate our discipleship through love. We begin by loving God ourselves, which grows our love for our children, which invigorates our prayers for our children, which strengthens our family worships, which in turn increases our love for God. As we participate in the process illustrated below, we will find our children growing in God and developing a Biblical worldview.



LOVING GOD

How do you start teaching children to love God and abide by his Word? Begin by loving God yourself. When a baby encounters a new food and is uncertain of it, the mother or father will usually take a bite to demonstrate that the food is good. When it comes to God, parents can join the Psalmist in telling their children, "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). If you as a

parent regularly enjoy and appreciate God's presence in your life, this will do two things. First, you will give a real-life demonstration of what it is that you are trying to teach. You can tell them what it is like to love God, but these will only be words until they can see a demonstration of what this means. We will unpack this idea more when we discuss modeling below but let us note here that deeds tend to speak more loudly than words. Showing them your enjoyment of Jesus is much more powerful than either telling them to enjoy Jesus or just saying that you love Jesus.

A second result of enjoying God yourself is that your desire for your child to develop a Biblical worldview will become more genuine and thus more powerful. If you genuinely love and enjoy the Lord, that will shine through in all that you do, including developing your child's worldview. We may assume that if you are reading this article, you already appreciate the presence of God in your life. If this is the case, that is beautiful! Keep diving deeper into your own love for God. In her book *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows*, Cheri Fuller writes, "The truth is, *you* must first enjoy God; otherwise, your children probably won't. And second, if you don't have a loving, trusting relationship with your children, they will tend to reject or miss much of the influence your spiritual life could have on them."³ The fact is that as a parent, you will serve as a bridge between your child and Jesus. The more you cultivate your relationship with Jesus, and the more you cultivate your relationship with your child, the stronger that bridge can become.

LOVING YOUR CHILD

Jesus loved children. "Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16) If Jesus cared so much for children, ought we not demonstrate that same love for our own children? We have been called to show the utmost love to our boys and girls.

Jesus took caring for children so seriously that he said, "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) Continuing this idea, Paul wrote in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Parents are expected to cherish and lovingly direct their children in the path of righteousness. This cannot be done without a close, loving connection between the parent and the child.

If you have a strong love for Jesus but a weak relationship with your child, your child will not be drawn any closer to Jesus. If anything, your child may want to turn further away from him. One way or another, they will associate you and Jesus. If the child feels secure and loved and cared for by you, they will likely experience God positively. However, if your child does not feel a close relationship with you but sees your close relationship with God, there is a good chance they will experience him negatively. In a recent multi-generational study, sociologist Vern Bengtson notes

this fact: “By every measure in this study, a young adult was more likely to share their parents’ religious beliefs and participation if they felt that they had a close relationship with those parents.”⁴ Relationship is key.

Along this line, we must not be eager as to manipulate our children to come to God. Author Karyn Henley writes, “We must not push for what we would like to see happen. Instead, we must wait on God and give him room and time to work as he wills. We have the privilege of watching God work in the lives of children, so that their ‘faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.’ (1 Corinthians 2:5)”⁵ By simply being in a loving relationship with your child, God can use you in his time to draw your child to him.

When Jesus was on earth, he told his disciples, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) In much the same way, children will understand their heavenly Father by looking at their parents. Therefore, in addition to enjoying and loving God, parents need enjoy and love their children.

There are many simple ways to demonstrate your love for your child. You can play together, cook together, or sing together. You can come up with a unique pet name for them, make a big deal when they accomplish a task and tell them you missed them after being apart. When they are frustrated, you can listen to their frustrations and empathize with them. When they are irresponsible, you can tell them, “I love you too much to let you do that; please stop.” When they are sad, you can wrap them up and gently rock them.⁶ Let your child know you love them as often as you can, both when it is easy and when it is difficult to love them. The more they hear it, the more the love between you will grow. It is through conscientiously growing the love and trust between you and God and between you and your child that forms a strong base foundation for your child’s Biblical worldview development. Your child will grow to trust that the taste of the Lord is indeed good.

PRAYING FOR YOUR CHILD

As you are loving and caring for your child, you will, of course, be praying for him or her. This is an important part of your child’s Biblical worldview development. As you pray for your child’s Christian development, remember to pray for these key areas:⁷

1. **Pray for their salvation.** “Therefore, I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10)
2. **Pray for God to direct in their lives.** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5,6)
3. **Pray for them to develop compassionate hearts.** “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)
4. **Pray for their physical and spiritual protection.** “...The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and

the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, you save me from violence.” (2 Samuel 22:2,3)

5. **Pray for the development of their character.** “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)
6. **Pray for God to fill their hearts with joy.** “...Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10b)
7. **Pray for them to desire that which God desires.** “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)
8. **Pray that they come to know God’s love.** “For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:14,17-19)
9. **Pray that they would come to love the Word of God.** “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
10. **Pray that God would give them a servant’s attitude.** “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.” (Ephesians 6:7, NIV)

Prayer is a powerful tool. Continually pour out your prayers to God on behalf of your children and he will hear and answer your prayers. It has been seen time and time again that parents who are consistent in praying for their children will see their sons and daughters grow and remain in the faith.

“Your compassionate Redeemer is watching you with love and sympathy, ready to hear your prayers and to render you the assistance which you need,” Ellen White writes. “He knows the burdens of every mother’s heart and is her best friend in every emergency. His everlasting arms support the God-fearing, faithful mother. When upon earth, He had a mother that struggled with poverty, having many anxious cares and perplexities, and He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares and anxieties. That Savior who took a long journey for the purpose of relieving the anxious heart of a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit will hear the mother’s prayers and will bless her children.”⁸ The prayers of a mother, or father, seeking God’s intervention in the life of a child will not be ignored.

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

The baseline of your child’s love for God can be grown through consistent family worship. In *Child Guidance*, Ellen White writes, “In the morning the Christian’s first thoughts should be upon God. Worldly labor and self-interest should be secondary. Children should be taught to respect and

reverence the hour of prayer.... It is the duty of Christian parents, morning and evening, by earnest prayer and persevering faith, to make a hedge about their children. They should patiently instruct them—kindly and untiringly teach them how to live in order to please God.”⁹ Several components can be used to grow children in Christ during family worship.

First is prayer in worship. When the child is an infant, praying with him or her will mean the parent showing the child a reverent posture (such as folded hands and closed eyes) and then leading in a brief sentence prayer. As the infant grows older, the parent can give longer prayers. When the child grows out of the toddler stage, he or she may be able to start doing repeated prayers, where the parent says a brief sentence and the child repeats. Eventually, the child will be able to say small prayers without assistance. We encourage parents to demonstrate an appreciation for prayer so that the child can see it is a special conversation between them and God. Parents should teach their children that prayer is an opportunity to talk heart-to-heart with their Heavenly Father. This is demonstrated in the Psalms and in Jesus’ own prayer life, which show openness and authenticity towards God in sharing hurts, joys, frustrations, problems, and victories.

Singing is also a wonderful component of worship. Ellen White once wrote that, “Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer.”¹⁰ Children learn well with song and rhyme and usually heartily enjoy singing. Teach them children’s Bible songs for them to understand and connect well with the lyrics, but don’t be afraid to teach them some hymns and praise songs as well—they can often pick them up quicker than you may think. Family singing can be a very bonding experience and is a great way to worship God. Songs can be sung all throughout the day: on walks, on car rides, at school, etc. If you encourage a heart of song in your child, this way of worshipping God can be integrated all throughout their day. Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)¹¹ Singing glorifies God, grows his word in your heart, and causes you to walk in the joy of the Lord.

Another component to worship is discussing life together. Share how your day has gone and point out how you have seen God at work in your life. Jesus shared much with his disciples, pointing out everyday tasks and objects like grain, light, farming, and more to demonstrate and discuss spiritual truths. There is much to be learned about God through sharing about each other’s day.

Of course, a key worship component is reading the Bible itself, preferably a simple translation or from storybooks—such as Bible stories written for children or stories which talk about God or teach Biblical morals in real life. Both kinds of reading are edifying for children. Parents may be tempted to only read storybook versions of the Bible to their children. Still, it is good to start reading Scripture together from a young age so they can start appreciating and getting used to the Bible itself. By reading from the Bible, your child will gain a Biblical awareness of the world and begin to see how scripture can apply to everyday life. Children will learn right from wrong as well as learning about the character of God.¹² This level of learning can only be achieved

through exposing your child to the Bible itself. Parents can read to infants and young children, but as children grow older, family worship can also be a good time for them to practice reading for themselves. As you read together, ask questions about the reading and answer questions they may have. Engage with the stories and discuss together.

We recommend starting each day with a short worship as a family to invite God into your home and hearts. Morning worship needs to be no longer than ten minutes and centered on what your children identify with best. You can sing a few songs or read a portion of scripture or a children's Bible story book and end with a prayer. Longer family worships (30 minutes or less) can be a nice way to conclude the day together in the evening.

In Ellen White's book *Prayer*, she writes, "Family worship should not be governed by circumstances. You are not to pray occasionally and, when you have a large day's work to do, neglect it. In thus doing you lead your children to look upon prayer as of no special consequence. Prayer means very much to the children of God and thank offerings should come up before God morning and evening. Says the psalmist, 'O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.' Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God's altar."¹³

Family worship is of the utmost importance for developing a Biblical worldview in your child. You can pray together, read together, sing together, and share together. This is a wonderful way to shape your child's perspective on God and the world, better solidifying their Biblical worldview.

CONCLUSION

Relationship requires a lot of work, commitment, and patience. It doesn't happen overnight. As a parent, though, the relationship you have with your child is the strongest factor for imparting a Biblical worldview to them. Thus, it is worth the time and effort.

The love that you show your child, the time you spend in prayer on their behalf, the experience of worshipping together all add to your child's growth in Christ. Ellen White writes in *Evangelism*, "By your manner of dealing with the little ones you can by the grace of Christ mold their characters for everlasting life, or by a wrong course of action you can give them the impress of a satanic character. Never act from impulse in governing children. Let authority and affection be blended. Cherish and cultivate all that is good and lovely and lead them to desire the higher good by revealing Christ to them."¹⁴

The more love you show your child, the more love they will have for God. It's as simple as that. Make time for your child, listen to him or her, show your child respect and bring out the best he or she has to offer.

NOTES

- ¹ All Bible quotes are taken from the NKJV.
- ² Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003), 380.
- ³ Cheri Fuller, *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows: Ideas to Nurture Your Child's Relationship with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 26.
- ⁴ As quoted in Dustin McClure, "Helping Kids Keep the Faith," Fuller Youth Institute, retrieved March 28, 2019, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/helping-kids-keep-the-faith>.
- ⁵ Karyn Henley, *Child-Sensitive Teaching* (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, 1997), 31.
- ⁶ You can find many ideas to show your children you love them. Here are two great websites to start giving you ideas: <https://afineparent.com/positive-parenting-faq/101-simple-ways-to-love-your-child.html>; <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/10-little-ways-show-your-kids-you-love-them-every-day.html>.
- ⁷ For more ideas of what to pray for your children, see what Lisa Jacobson writes at <https://club31women.com/12-powerful-verses-pray-children/>, and Nancy Jergins at <https://www.imom.com/10-ways-to-pray-for-your-child/#.XIGTx2hKhPY>
- ⁸ Ellen White, *Adventist Home* (Silverspring, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 204.
- ⁹ Ellen White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 519.
- ¹⁰ *The Youth Instructors Articles*, (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press Incorporated, 2013), 1238.
- ¹¹ Note also Ephesians 5:18b,19: "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."
- ¹² Wesley Haystead, *Everything You Want to Know About Teaching Young Children: Birth—6 Years* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989), 12-13.
- ¹³ Ellen White, *Prayer* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), 189.
- ¹⁴ Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Silverspring, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 582.