

A young child with light skin and brown hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a light blue bow at the waist. The child is smiling and looking towards the camera. They are holding a pink pencil in their right hand, which is raised towards a piece of white paper. On the paper, there is a drawing of a flower with red petals and green leaves. To the left of the paper is a watercolor paint palette with various colors including blue, green, and brown. The background is a soft, out-of-focus pink and white pattern.

INVESTING IN THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILDREN

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Introduction

Congratulations! You have just received one of the greatest gifts God ever bestows upon a person - the gift of parenthood! And what a great gift it will be! All of the ups and downs, valleys and peaks: the spills, chills, and thrills. Your life will never be the same, and this is where your greatest challenge lies before you: Making sure your child's life is not the same either.

The world in which your child will grow up holds great opportunity. Technology, government, society, education have all made just about anything possible - whether good or bad. Your child will not only have the greatest opportunities any generation has ever known, they will also face the greatest temptations and pitfalls of any generation. As a parent, you need to prepare your child to face this bold, new world.

First and foremost it is important to understand that your life as a parent will have a profound impact on the development of your child more than any other influence in the world. God designed it this way. As your child grows, he or she will see your example, values, direction, and your passion for life. Your life will leave an impression all the days of their life. As you grow your own life, your goal should be to build in your child a solid foundation of values, skills, morals, and ethics so that child will mature into a healthy, complete, mature person.

The Power of Faith:

Where do I begin? The most significant investment parents can make in the life of their child is to give them the gift of faith. At this stage it is very important to understand the difference between faith and religion.

Religion is primarily concerned with following rules of behavior and committing religious acts in order to gain the favor of God.

Faith is different. Faith begins with what people believe about God and about themselves. Faith is about believing and knowing God's favor, God's acceptance and God's love. Faith then moves a person towards the purpose God has designed for their life and how this purpose gives his or her life direction, meaning and fulfillment. As a parent, your job is to first create an environment where your child can understand faith and then a context where they can begin living out their young faith.

What impact does the gift of faith have on my child? What impact does the gift of faith have on my child? Faith is very important in the development of children. **First**, as a child grows, he or she invariably want to know where they came from, why they are here, and what purpose that life possesses. You are able to answer the questions of life truthfully and honestly. No child is an accident or mistake. God knew they were coming, and He has a purpose for that life. There may be adults who make poor choices and do illegitimate things. However, that does not mean that children are illegitimate. Remember, God has a purpose for your child, and your job as a parent is to help your child discover the purpose in the life God has designed for your child. When you give your child the gift of faith, you are giving them the gift of purpose also.

Second, by investing in your child's faith, you give them the gift of security. Children who have a strong faith in God will feel secure in being loved and cared for. As children grow, they will experience great heartache and pain. Their friends may reject them, they may struggle with bullies and even adults will disappoint them. When you give your child the gift of faith, you are giving them the knowledge that God always loves them, and He will never forsake them and will always be there for them in any circumstance. Faith will give them a deep sense of security in a crazy world. Giving the gift of faith to your child will establish them on a firm foundation as they face the world.

Third, by investing in your child's faith, you give that child the gift of direction. Children are strongly seeking to know right from wrong, good and bad, positive from negative. Parents who encourage and seek to strengthen the faith of their children will see them receive this direction.

Finally, when you invest in the faith of your children, they develop a strong and healthy self-image. The Bible speaks often of who we are in Jesus Christ. It says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) The world will tell your child he or she doesn't measure up, and may not have what it takes to succeed. As your child watches TV, he or she will always see someone funnier, richer, more talented or athletic than he or she. Satan uses these images to get children to compare themselves and find fault. When children develop a solid faith, they know that they are special, because God made them that way, and God does not make mistakes. There are times when children have special challenges or needs, just because the world sees them as something less, doesn't mean God sees them as something less. A healthy self-image is based not on what children think about themselves, but on knowing what God thinks about them.

Is it possible for children to develop these attributes without growing up in a church? Of course it is possible. The real question is: but is it likely? In other words, a church was given to you as a gift from God in order to help you give your child the gift of faith. Leaving a community of faith out of your child's life often creates obstacles many children find hard to resolve.

What is my focus as a parent and what goals should I set?

1. Always teach right from wrong. Make sure to set firm limits and then hold to them. Don't set too many limits or too few. Remember, that when you teach right from wrong, you are giving your children the opportunity to know who they are and why God loves them so much. This is the beginning of responsibility for one's self.

2. Teach obedience. This can be the hardest lesson to teach a child. The strength of your child's will is the determining factor in how difficult it can be. One rule of thumb, try not to get caught in power struggles with your young children. Allow them to discover their independence by giving them choices. However, don't give in to their demands, as they must be taught obedience in order to flourish in society. Finally, by teaching obedience, you are giving your child the greatest bridge to understanding and following God. Self-willed, stubborn, prideful people find it is very difficult to know and follow God.

3. Teach respect. Respect is the practical application of the golden rule found in the bible. Jesus said, "Treat others as you desire to be treated." Never allow your child to be disrespectful, even when they are upset or strongly disagree with your parenting decision.

4. Teach honor. Honor is the valuation of attitudes that make life special. What you honor as a parent is what your child will honor. If you honor love, respect and generosity, your child will honor the same things. If you honor love, respect and fame, your child will honor them as well.

5. Teach acceptance from God. The greatest gift to give your child is the knowledge that God loves them beyond understanding. Don't ever use God as a tool for punishment, i.e: "God is going to get you for that!". Always remember to communicate that God has a deep love for each of us, and that He gave His son so that your child could have a second chance in life.

6. Teach life's purpose. Finally, make sure to regularly emphasize that God has a purpose for your child's life. In doing so that child will gain a feeling of significance and perseverance. Purpose in life answers the question of why we are here as well as teaches us that even though things don't go the way we think they should, we can endure because in the end our perseverance will make a difference.

The Specific Steps for Developing Your Child's Faith

Step One:

Dedicate yourself and child to God. The cliché "It's caught, more than taught" is very true. If you do it, your children will follow your example. If you pray, they pray. If you read your Bible, they will want to read the Bible as well. If you are serious and dedicated to your faith in God, they will be dedicated to their faith. You can make a formal commitment to God through a Baby Dedication. This is a formal ceremony with a pastor where you take vows before God to pursue and live your faith as an example to your child and give him or her every opportunity of faith in Jesus Christ.

Step Two:

Take full advantage of biblical instruction at Foothills. The goal of our children's ministry is to make Bible instruction the best hour of a child's week. We offer the following ministries for your child's faith development:

- 1. Sunday morning classes** at 9:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m. These are graded courses and offer solid Bible lessons and instruction.
- 2. Summer programs.** Elementary through High School, we offer graded programs for children during the summer. These are great opportunities to grow in their faith.
- 3. Athletic programs.**

Step Three:

Establish social groups for your children. One of the most important jobs you have as a parent is to choose your children's social group. The church is the place to find friends for your kids, and we strongly encourage you to develop friendships with other families in the church.

Step Four:

Consider the appropriate time for discussing spiritual things with your children. By discussing things such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, tithing, and going on a short term missions trip, you give the child a rite of passage that is very important for their development.

Step Five:

Ask family and friends to pray for your children.

Step Six:

As your child grows, encourage your child to develop a mentoring relationship with a spiritually mature adult in the church.

Frequently Asked Questions:**1. How do I dedicate myself and my child to the Lord?**

Call the church office at 208- 853-0011 and ask for the next Baby Dedication event.

2. Why doesn't the church practice infant baptism ?

Our goal is not to invalidate a person's spiritual journey. Our goal is to follow the Bible based upon the best scholarship at our disposal. Infant baptism is based upon a doctrinal position called "original sin." This position teaches that sin is passed on from person to person through birth, similar to genetic flaws. This position teaches that in order to protect children, they must have this genetic flaw removed as early as possible. Foothills believes the Bible teaches that everyone who ever lived (other than Jesus) is flawed (Romans 3:23 and 5:12.) However, the Bible does not necessarily teach that our sin is genetically passed on. The church understands the Bible to teach what is termed "Believer's Baptism." In essence, this means that when an individual decides to get baptized, it is due to his or her belief in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. Infants are unable to make a choice based on belief. Children who are not baptized are not in danger due to the protection of their parents until they reach the "Age of Accountability." This is the age when they understand their need for spiritual redemption. Consequently, the church dedicates children to the Lord.

3. When should I talk to my child about getting baptized?

The church practices Believer's Baptism, it is important to wait until the child is old enough to understand what it means to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. Eight years of age is on the early side and somewhere between ten and up is usually a good time. However, it is important to note that it is your role as a parent to determine, with your child, when is the best time to take this step.

4. When should I teach my child to tithe?

The best time to start is when you begin to teach them about money management. Often, this coincides with the beginning of an allowance.

5. What do I do if my child wants Jesus in their heart?

First, it is important to evaluate if your child wants to do this for you or because he or she truly understands the need for Jesus. Evaluating this can be done by asking the child why it is important to ask Jesus into his or her heart. You will know the answer if the child has faith or are simply wanting to do it for you. (If you are unsure, talk to someone in the Children's Ministry to help you evaluate.) Second, ask questions to see if the child understands why Jesus came, why He died on the cross and how He helps them to know God.