

10 ways to guide your child's spiritual formation

Parenting can be as daunting as it is wonderful. While the never-ending, hour-by-hour duties can seem troubling (How will we get the cooking and cleaning and class prep and grading done without forgetting to bathe and clothe and feed the kid, and without plunking him in front of the idiot box?), these pale in comparison to raising a child who is sensitive to God's presence and direction. While nurturing your child's spiritual growth is more challenging than memorizing a creed, cate-chism, or getting to church on time, it's also a lot more exhilarating. Children are spiritual beings already—we simply need to give them the space, the language, and the chance to develop.

1. Be fully honest

Share with your child your sense about who you are as a child of God. We must believe that God actually loves us if we expect our children to believe that, too.

2. Treat your child like a partner

Believe she has something to teach you. She may already have a profound relationship with God—wouldn't you love to hear about it?

3. Introduce your child to ritual, not just schedule

The rhythms of the day and year can be moments of sacred activity: lighting a candle before evening prayer, lighting Advent candles at church, following Jesus through Lent, Good Friday, and Easter.

4. Develop your child's imagination

My son once declared God was imaginary, by which he meant that God was invisible. A few days later he declared that God was real. In his mind, there was no contradiction between the two. A well-developed imagination will help your child understand parables, poems, stories, imagery—all of which the Bible uses to explore who God is and how God works.

5. Expose your child to differences

Encourage your child to celebrate the variety in people, trees, flowers, animals. Spirituality looks very different in different places and people.

6. Celebrate your child's questions

Resist the urge to answer every question with the standard response. Plumb the questions you hear, try to find out what is behind them, and rejoice in your child's inquisitiveness.

7. Pray with your child in many different ways and settings

Help him see that prayers can be read, sung, silent, loud, wordless, cried, shouted, drawn, lived ...

8. Look up

Get a telescope and marvel together at the hugeness of God's creation.

9. Look down

Get a microscope and marvel together at the minuteness of God's creation.

10. Wonder with your child

Talk about the questions you have, ask about her big wonderings, and press her to wonder more. Don't be afraid to ask a question that she (and you!) don't have the answer to.

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