

Dear Mom and Dad,

So your child is heading off to college, perhaps not this fall but sometime in the future, and you are worried about how he or she will fare spiritually. The bad news is, you have reason to worry. Statistics show that the college experience can be a spiritual death chamber for Christian students. A 2006 Barna study revealed that over 60 percent of twenty-somethings who had been raised in the church were no longer involved in spiritual activities such as church participation and Bible reading after graduating from college. Some studies put the percentage at 75 percent. If you are starting to break out into cold sweats, I understand. →


Five Things



You Can Do

to Prepare Your Child
Spiritually for College

By Jim Musser



But there is some good news. God is at work on campus. Campus ministries are thriving at universities all across the country and many students, instead of abandoning their faith, are growing spiritually. I've been a campus minister for more than 25 years and I would like to suggest five things parents can do to lessen the chance their child becomes one more spiritual casualty. Keep in mind, however, that several of these suggestions involve actions that need to begin long before your child is thinking about college. If your child is leaving the nest this fall, take heart knowing God's grace covers a multitude of parental shortcomings.

Model discipleship.

My parents took me to church when I was growing up, but at home I saw little evidence that Jesus was Lord of their lives. They never prayed or read the Scriptures. They fought frequently and gossiped about the neighbors. Sadly, even though I was a church-going child,

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I had little respect or interest in spiritual things because, for a child, the parents are the key role model. Children can hear a lot of things at church, but if the parents are not living them out, they are likely to have much less impact.

The truth is many young people leave the faith because it never really held much meaning for them growing up. They may have gone to church, been involved in the youth group, perhaps even were baptized, but faith never took root because they never saw their parents living it out.

Take responsibility.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 says:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

God has given parents the responsibility of teaching their children about him, his Word, and how to live for him. Contrary to common practice, the local church and the children's and youth ministers are to play only a supportive role. Without parents laying the solid spiritual foundation in their kids' lives, the church is severely handicapped in its supportive role. Children are looking to parents for what is important in life. If parents don't believe it is important to read the Scriptures, to pray, and to please the Lord, then often no matter how much their children are involved in church activities, they do not learn how to have a growing and vibrant spiritual life.

Years ago, two of my good friends asked if they could join our ministry's spring break trip to Louisiana to help with hurricane relief. They also wanted to bring along their two children who were 10 and 12 at the time. Their goal was to help Laura and Patrick learn the joy of serving others and for them to see how their parents and other adults made serving the Lord an integral part of their lives. Today, both of those children are adults and faithfully serving the Lord. Their parents still talk about that week in Louisiana as an important spiritual experience for their kids. They modeled for their kids a vibrant spiritual life and demonstrated in practical ways what that looked like.

Raise them to follow the Lord.

This may sound similar to the previous suggestion, but I have found good Christian parents can do the above but then limit their vision for what the Lord may want to do with their kids. Some of our students have wanted to participate in mission trips, but their Christian parents objected out of fear for their child's safety or because they would be gone over the Christmas holiday. And when some students have contemplated going into vocational missions, their Christian parents have offered resistance, fearing they would have to "beg" for money or that they would be depriving potential grandparents of access to their grandchildren.

The reality is when we give our lives to Jesus, they are no longer our own; we have been bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19). There is nothing wrong with having dreams and goals for your kids—getting married, having a secure job, living close by—but if you claim Jesus as Lord and pass that belief on to your kids, then you have to relinquish their future to him because he is their Lord, not you. They are to serve him first.

Following Jesus means great sacrifice and there is probably no greater sacrifice a parent can make than to say, "Lord, here is my child; do with him what you will." I can't think of any greater joy for Christian parents than hearing their child say she wants to follow Jesus wherever he leads.

Consider the resources.

If your children's spiritual lives are of the utmost importance to you, then your search for the right college should reflect that. While tuition, housing, and scholarship opportunities are important, the availability of spiritual resources (a vibrant Bible-believing church or campus ministry) is just as important, if not more so. Jesus questioned the value of a person gaining the whole world but losing his soul (Matthew 16:26).

Rarely have I seen Christian parents make spiritual resources a main criterion for choosing a college. Normally, it is only after the school is selected that they begin trying to connect their

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kids with a church or campus ministry. If the percentage of young people abandoning their faith is going to be reduced, then parents will need to place more emphasis on the availability of spiritual resources for their children when choosing a college. After all the years of raising your kids to love the Lord, it would be a shame to send them off to a college where they will get a great education but flounder spiritually.

Expose them to campus ministries.

My college roommate told me that when he arrived at college he thought he would be the only Christian on campus. Sadly, many Christians are ignorant about what God is doing on our university campuses. They view the university experience as something Christian students simply must survive spiritually. This may be why parents rarely look into the spiritual resources on campus. They aren't aware they exist.

You can positively affect your children's spiritual futures by beginning to expose them to the work God is doing on campus. As you begin your search for college opportunities, connect your children with campus ministries or churches with college ministries on those campuses. Arrange a visit to one of their large group meetings. Ask for a meeting with one or two students to get their perspective on the ministry and to build a connection for your child if he happens to attend that school. Any campus ministry would love to connect with a student before he or she walks onto campus.

If parents implement these five suggestions for raising children and preparing them for college, the likelihood of them abandoning their faith after they leave home will be reduced significantly. You will be able to send them off in confidence you have done everything you could for them and then leave them in the hands of the Lord to use them as he wills. *



Resources

Find a list of campus ministries at universities across the country at

www.aofcm.org

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