

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

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Laying the foundation for a child's life of faith is a critical part of a Christian parent's job. Clearly it's important for the child, but it's also vital for a healthy Christian church. What a blessing that taking care of one also helps take care of the other. Our authors this month have great advice to help with both.

—Nicole Balza

## IF OUR KIDS ARE TO BE THE CHURCH LEADERS OF TOMORROW, WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING TO PREPARE THEM TODAY?

MY BABIES aren't babies anymore. This year, one begins high school, one becomes a teenager, and one turns a decade old. Parenting shifts with each season, but one truth remains: Our time on this side of heaven finds purpose only in Christ. Every experience, person, and place is part of God's design, preparing us—and our children—for what he has planned.

As Christian parents, we are blessed to be part of that preparation. We vigilantly care for our children's faith formation, trusting God's Word to cultivate strong roots in them. With these roots and motivated by Christ's love, we pray they grow into:

**Humble Christians** who recognize their sin, rest in Christ's redemptive work, and walk in gospel freedom. We want them to know this: We sin daily, but Christ has restored our relationship with God. In him, we are new creations.

**Thankful children** of God who delight in worshiping him—both publicly and privately. We want them to cherish gathering with God's people and prioritize personal devotion and prayer.

**Lifelong learners** who root themselves in God's Word. Our kids need to grow in biblical knowledge. We desire that they study and meditate on God's story, deeds, character, and truth.

**Discerning disciples** who faithfully apply God's law and gospel in daily life. With a biblical lens, they can navigate a complex world, distinguishing truth from falsehood and living as salt and light.

**Selfless servants** who use their God-given gifts to glorify him and love others. Whether at home, in church, or in the community, we want them to reflect Christ through generous service.

**Confident witnesses** who are prepared to share the hope they have in Jesus. I often tell my kids that if salvation were the only goal, God would have taken us home at our baptism. But we're still here because he has a purpose for us.

How do we as Christian parents guide our children toward this vision?

**Model:** More than words, our example speaks volumes. Our kids see how we handle stress, treat

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others, and prioritize God. We won't model perfection. However, with God's help, we aim to live the faith we want them to grow into, showing them lives fully rooted in Jesus.

**Talk:** God's Word should be part of our everyday conversations—not just during devotions. Whether responding to life's challenges or casual moments, we point our kids to his truth. The world is constantly speaking into their lives; we must speak louder.

**Protect and correct:** Parenting means guarding our kids' hearts and fostering in them God-pleasing decision-making. It also means correcting them with grace when they stray. God calls us to disciple our kids lovingly—protecting their faith and mentoring their walk with him.

We won't parent perfectly, a reality to share with our kids, but then we point to Christ's perfect work

that covers all our failures. Despite our flaws, we prepare our children today, trusting God for what he has designed for their future. After all, our children are not just part of our family—they are God's family, called for his purpose.



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Learn more about the new theology curriculum (p. 25).

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“JOHN LEFT them to return to Jerusalem.”

That's all we are told in Acts 13:13, but we can surmise much from the surrounding context. We know that John (also known as Mark) was young. We know this was Paul's first mission trip and the team was fresh off an encounter with a sorcerer in Cyprus. But we also know that the circumstances of this departure were so unfavorable that Paul refused to take John-Mark on the next mission trip.

Maybe John-Mark got scared off. Maybe he was homesick. We're not sure, but we do know this—he wasn't given up on. Barnabas took him on another mission trip when Paul wouldn't. A good thing too! Later John-Mark reconciled with Paul and became a trusted friend. John-Mark even grew so much in his leadership that the one who formerly flaked out of gospel ministry actually became the author of the gospel book that bears his name (Mark).

Anyone who works with children, teens, or young adults will at some point be disappointed. They're young. They're inexperienced. They're sinful. They will fail and they will flop—sometimes epically. So how do we train up these young believers as the leaders of tomorrow? Here are three key points:

**Young people need patient, loving mentors.** Younger believers need people like Barnabas. We shouldn't suggest that Paul gave up on John-Mark. Paul just didn't think it wise to take John-Mark with him, and perhaps Paul was right for what he was planning. At the same time, we can admire Barnabas (whose name means “encouragement”) for his patient persistence with John-Mark.

I've noticed that when young people fail—and they will—if you clearly show patient, persistent love, they will love and respect you more than ever. Additionally, patient, persistent love builds confidence that it's okay to fail and to keep on trying and learning. Really, this kind of love is nothing more than modeling the love that Christ has had for us and the kind of love young people can display in their future vocations.

A book called *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* suggests that young people need five quality Christian mentors to grow and remain in the faith. How might we work to find five Barnabas-like mentors to train up our future leaders?

**Young people need relevant, relatable Bible studies.** In our circles, we have a long history of telling “the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord” (Psalm 78:4). From our school systems to catechism classes to quality products from our publishing house, we teach well. One thing I've heard often from teens, though, is that while they appreciate how much they have learned, they would love to have Bible studies that apply more to what they specifically go through.

The Bible is more than a factbook. God's Word is “alive and active” (Hebrews 4:12) and never returns to him empty (Isaiah 55:11). Young people yearn to understand how this powerful Word of God will help them through their life situations. They need the law and gospel to be applied in terms they understand in their specific contexts. They need to find strength for the unique situations they are going through. Young people who learn by the Holy Spirit how relevant the Word is are far more likely to continue in their diligent study and growth in that Word.

**Young people need faith experiences.** The youngest generations are interested in making a difference, feeling valued, and changing the world. When those passions are combined with faith, it can be powerful!

I've seen young people serve food at homeless shelters, teach children at vacation Bible school programs across the world, plan and run food and clothing drives, knock on doors while canvassing, use their gifts in worship, and so much more. Whatever the circumstance, the teens have expressed how much it meant to them not just to talk about their faith but actually put it into action. Activating young people in the faith is one of the best ways to train them and get them excited for leadership.

It didn't really work out so well for John-Mark the first time he tried leadership on a mission trip. Yet how much did he take from that experience and what followed into the future? How much did Barnabas' patient love and mentorship help him grow? And how much did the Holy Spirit work through him to do big things in the future?

God help us to train up the next generation to be such amazing leaders in the future.



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