

Before It's Too Late

Spiritual leadership in the home starts now.

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Few tasks are more fulfilling yet more challenging, more thrilling yet more demanding, more rewarding yet more exasperating than fatherhood and the responsibility of being a spiritual leader in the home.

For me, being a spiritual leader began with total ignorance. When we brought our first of four babies home, I didn't have a clue how enormous the task would be or how to begin my journey. Failure would be the trademark of my first few years on the job.

My oldest son, Brady, grew up with a big smile and a sensitive disposition that cause me to work hard on my rough edges. His first successful bike ride without training wheels came at 5 years old when the summer camps I run were in full swing. He was excited; I was busy at work (as usual). He caught me at lunch and announced the good news.

"Daddy, guess what I did today."

"Tell me, Son!"

"I learned to ride my bike – ho helper wheels!"

"Wow, that's great! I've got to see that. You can show me this afternoon."

"Nah, Dad, I'll show you after summer."

"Why after summer?"

He dropped his eyes.

"You work, during the summer, Dad."

Time to change

Those words still haunt me. The truth was, I worked in the fall, the winter and the spring, as well – I was just not available for my children.

That same summer my 6-year-old daughter, Courtney, was spending the week at our nearby short-term camp. We agreed not to see her the entire week. It wasn't easy!

Her fifth night at camp, Courtney got a touch of homesickness. She began to cry, and her counselor came to her bed to give her some hugs and tenderness.

"Don't cry. You'll be home in two days, and you'll get to see your daddy."

"I never get to see my daddy!" was her protest.

After the summer ended, the camp director came to my house. "Sit down," he said abruptly. I sat down. He told me the story of the conversation between Courtney and her counselor. It broke my heart.

Then he said, "What are you going to do about it?"

I squirmed. He looked deeply into my eyes. The phone rang and as I answered it, the intercom buzzed. Then someone came to the door with an emergency. I sat back down. He was still looking intently at me.

"I asked you, what are you going to do about it?" he pressed.

"I don't know....It's hard.... There are so many demands."

"Joe, who are the most important people in your life?"

"My family."

"You're not showing it!"

He sat there and didn't give an inch. He forced me to make commitments to my family I'm carrying out to this day. The demands are still there, but my priorities changed.

Becoming a spiritual leader

Scripture is clear. God's principles for success and fulfillment are unwavering. God knows every breath we will take and sees every hair that falls from our ever-depleting scalps. His infinite wisdom calls dads to spiritually lead in our homes like the Carpenter from Nazareth did with those around Him. Leading means washing feet, modeling impeccable integrity and picking up our cross to follow Jesus.

I had to learn this the hard way 25 years ago when my four kids cried out for my spiritual leadership in our home. I discovered that it's never too late to start, but it's always too early to quit.

Taking the lead at home

Dads and moms can find ideas on building a spiritual heritage in their home at www.focusonyourchild.com. This site offers insight on choosing a church, ways to talk to God, family devotions, recognizing teachable moments, and more. You will also find tips on raising healthy, confident and well-adjusted children in today's world.