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7 Ways
to

**ENCOURAGE
TODAY'S
PARENTS**

as
Spiritual
Influencers
AT HOME

7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE TODAY'S PARENTS AS SPIRITUAL INFLUENCERS AT HOME

Featuring work by Michelle Anthony, Jim Burns, Jeremy Lee, and Megan Marshman

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About the Featured Authors

These ministry leaders provide biblical insight and hands-on experience for helping today's families grow in love and knowledge of God and His Word.

Michelle Anthony, PhD, serves as the executive pastor of family ministries at New Life Church in Colorado and is the founder of *HomeFront* magazine. Michele has written titles including *7 Family Ministry Essentials*, *Spiritual Parenting*, and *Big God Story*.

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Megan Marshman leads the young adult ministry at Arbor Road Church and directs women's ministries at Hume Lake Christian Camps in California. Megan has written titles including *7 Family Ministry Essentials* and *SelfLess*.

This resource features excerpts from the following books, used by permission:

- *Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today's Families* by Michelle Anthony
- *7 Family Ministry Essentials: A Strategy for Culture Change in Children's and Student Ministries* by Michelle Anthony and Megan Marshman
- *Pass It On: Building a Legacy of Faith for Your Children through Practical and Memorable Experiences* by Jim Burns and Jeremy Lee

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7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE TODAY'S PARENTS AS SPIRITUAL INFLUENCERS AT HOME

A BIBLICAL BLUEPRINT

Excerpted from *Pass It On* by Jim Burns & Jeremy Lee

The idea of passing on one's faith can be intimidating, and the realization that a child's view of God comes from what he or she receives (and perceives) at home makes most parents cringe. Frankly, there have been times in our own lives when that reality has been downright terrifying.

When faced with the task of passing on their faith, parents tend to respond in one of five ways. They

1. become paralyzed, so they ignore it and do nothing;
2. overcompensate and do more than needed;
3. select a book, give it to their child, and hope he or she figures it out;
4. delegate the task to someone else, and hope it works out for the best; or
5. understand the vital role parents have in the life of their child and strategically pass on faith to him or her.

What if we told you the blueprint for passing on faith has already been designed? God gave it to us in the Bible, and He provides very specific instructions on how to leave a spiritual legacy.

Pretty exciting, isn't it? It's both simple and challenging.

Many biblical scholars regard Deuteronomy—and chapter 6 in particular—as the thesis statement of the entire Old Testament. Even today it is understood as the purpose and plan of the Hebrew people. It has been that way since the days of Moses. This blueprint is known as the Shema, meaning “to listen” in Hebrew. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

There is a three-point purpose in these words:

1. Faithfulness and fidelity (loyalty) to God (Deut. 6:4–5)
2. Transmission of faith and love to children (Deut. 6:6–7)
3. Constant mindfulness of the teachings and presence of God (Deut. 6:8–9)

These three points are the road map to passing on faith. [As a ministry leader, you can encourage a family's commitment] to living a life of loyalty to God. Parents are to love Him with everything they have and with all their strength (Deut. 6:4–5). As they live out their faith to the best of their ability, they impress faith upon the

hearts of their children (Deut. 6:6–7). Finally, they bring the presence of God into the lives of their kids by allowing the presence of God to be integral to their everyday activities (Deut. 6:8–9).

When parents understand their roles in passing on legacies of faith to their children, they don't have to think of this task as a burden; it is, instead, one of the major goals and privileges of raising children.

Ultimately, children must make their own faith decisions. And they are much more likely to do so when influenced by a parent who speaks and lives out faith in the home. There is something special about the love between a mother or father and a child. In fact, there is no greater influence in the life of a child than a parent.

Through your ministry to children and youth, you can be an invaluable partner with their parents in this incredible opportunity.

AN ACTIVE APPROACH

Excerpted from *7 Family Ministry Essentials* by Megan Marshman

One habit I like to assume in equipping parents is an *Instruct, Model, Practice, and Empower* approach.

Instructing includes any teaching, framing (or reframing), Scripture, and expectations. But often we think that in the abundance of information there will be change. Not so—and this is where *Modeling* comes in. We must next show parents what this looks like. We can ask someone to serve as an example, or we can just talk parents through it in practical terms. We have to translate the information into their realities.

Next, we need to let them get their hands dirty while the instruction is fresh in their minds. Parents get to *Practice* what they have just learned. I've found that this works well in one-on-one or small group settings to create some form of safety for the learners.

Lastly, we need to *Empower* our parents. This is a charge to go home and continue to practice. It is our faith and confidence in them to take baby steps and to manage their expectations.

I remember a single mom who wanted to begin to bless her preteen son at home but was sure that he would want no part in it. I encouraged her just to take it slowly and to do what came naturally. I advised her not to think of this as an all-or-nothing campaign.

She later told me the story of how one night she simply told him by name that she loved him before he went to bed. After a few days, she stood at the door and shared her love but also recited a blessing from God's Word that her son would be strong and courageous at school. Later, she did this standing next to his bed while touching his arm. She rejoiced when she told me that he did not recoil from her touch.

Finally, she did all of this with the lights on, looking her son in the eyes! This empowerment, coupled with baby steps, culminated one night while this son lay in bed yelling for his mother. When she yelled back to see what he wanted, he shouted, "You forgot to bless me tonight!"

7 PARENTING PRINCIPLES FOR SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE

Excerpted from *Spiritual Parenting* by Michelle Anthony

Big journeys begin with small steps. Within your ministry context, consider how you can actively Instruct, Model, Practice, and Empower each of the seven parenting principles for spiritual influence. We'll share some of our experiences as examples.

These principles can spark team-building discussions with volunteers or become topics for devotional talks with parents. And, you can further develop these ideas for training events or sermons to help parents gain confidence in their spiritual influence at home.

If you're a ministry leader and a parent—or even grandparent—we hope these principles will also benefit you personally. The more you incorporate them into your family life at home, the more you'll discover insight for equipping parents in your church.

1. BECOME LIVING TESTAMENTS OF LOVE FOR JESUS

What better way to [have children] fall in love with Jesus than for [their parents to become] living testimonies of what that means? One thing is true in spiritual parenting: *You can't give away something you don't have!*

Let me illustrate this: I have been rock climbing before, and I really enjoyed it. I did a good job at following directions, but I am certainly a novice on the ropes. Now, if I were to offer to take you rock climbing on one of the highest gorges in the world and be your instructor, I can pretty much guarantee that you wouldn't be willing to do that. You would wisely recognize that I can't teach you to do something that I don't understand the fundamentals of myself. Yet often the mindset we embrace as parents is based on our desire for our children to have a more vibrant spiritual relationship with Christ than we ourselves are currently experiencing.

Think about it. We want so much for our children. We want them to have a better education than we did. We want them to have better opportunities. We want them to have life a little easier, with less struggle or pain. In general, we want them to have *more* than we had. We are guilty even of sometimes wanting them to have a more genuine spiritual life than we do. But the fact is that we are living examples of what is real, and unfortunately, we can't give away something we don't possess.

So spiritual parenting reminds me that it's not my job to merely control my children's behavior, but rather it is my job to model with authenticity *what I have* in my relationship with God through Christ. And hopefully what I have is worth passing on to the next generation.

2. SHOW THE REALITY OF GOD IN THE NATURAL FLOW OF LIFE

Our children hunger to see the reality of who God is in the natural flow of our lives—when we're getting up, when we're sitting down, when we're on a journey, when we're putting them to bed. It's not that the formalized methodology is bad, because it definitely has a place. It's just that it's not best apart from a role model. Our children need to see that faith matters, that it's relevant to our daily situations, that it's real. We need to model how our lives are spiritual in every decision, erasing the divide between sacred and secular. They need to witness firsthand that our faith is not merely something we compartmentalize when it's convenient to do so.

Some of my best moments of sharing the reality of God with my children were ones I didn't plan. They just happened. There were days when money was tight and we prayed for God to provide. Then we waited. And without our expecting it, a refund check from the insurance company arrived in the mail. There were times

when we were held up from traveling somewhere because a neighbor needed our assistance, only to find that we were spared from an accident on the highway that occurred just moments before.

Other days were filled with trips to the zoo, where my son was so amazed by the diversity of the animals that he asked me, “Who thought of that?” Questions about why there is a rainbow in the sky after it rains, what the story of the Bible is, where God lives, where people go when they die, why we give money at church, why we pray or sing or worship—all of these become natural teachable moments of sharing our faith with our children when we generously live it in front of them.

3. CULTIVATE ENVIRONMENTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Faith is supernatural. I am not capable of creating it in another person. I can give you all the information about something, and you can still not believe or experience an unwavering conviction. We can probably all think of someone who has been exposed to the truth of Scripture and of God and yet still doesn't believe. It takes a supernatural transformation. Just as belief and trust that produce faith in a person's life are a supernatural transaction, the behavior and action that align with faith need to flow supernaturally. When we try to manufacture this or impose it on others, they become resistant or even rebellious.

Believe it or not, this is where freedom comes in. As [parents put their] children in proximity to God, to fall in love with Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes [children's] actions congruent with their belief. He's the one who causes the process of their hearts to become more and more like Jesus'. This is true transformation. As [children's] faith is vibrant, their actions become vibrant. So often our temptation as parents is to spend all of our time and energy striving to fix their behavior—a process that is not our responsibility.

What is our job then? The joy of parenting can be spent on cultivating environments for our children's faith to grow, teaching them how to cultivate a love relationship with Jesus as we cultivate our own, living our lives authentically in front of them so that they become eyewitnesses to our own transformation.

As a young teenager, I heard my dad get up early every morning to go downstairs. I never heard the TV or heard busyness in the kitchen, but one day I saw what he had been doing down there every morning. He was kneeling, praying, and reading God's Word. I can't remember my dad ever telling me I “should” read my Bible, but it was modeled for me quietly and consistently—and that was captivating to me. Understanding our part in this process of spiritual parenting is foundational for us before we embark on the rest of this book.

4. MODEL FAITH THROUGH FEARS AND MISTAKES

From a very early age I felt my dad was such a great example to me, even in his shortcomings and failures, because he consistently identified when his behavior was not congruent with that of Jesus. Moreover, he then modeled for me what to do when that happens: You go to the person, you ask for their forgiveness, and then you make it right.

This modeled for me that I didn't have to be perfect. It modeled that when I fall short, I need to take responsibility. This is a crucial part of parenting, because we are tempted to think of *modeling* in terms of a “standard.” We think of it as some kind of perfection that we try to attain. Instead, we have the privilege of being a living, breathing model of grace when we fail and of grace when we get it right. Either way—we are compelled by grace! We model this truth as long as we make our words congruent with God's standards.

[Mistakes often come with pain. So do challenges and trials. Yet if] I know that spiritual growth comes out of my painful trials, why do I try to protect my children from similar experiences? Why would I want to keep

my children from the very things that I know, firsthand, will grow their faith in God and their dependence on Christ? Why? Because it pains me to see them hurt. As parents we lose sight of the end goal, and we sacrifice it for today's pleasure. It is counterintuitive to our primal instincts as moms and dads to let our children hurt. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight this instinct.

What are we afraid of, anyway? That the pain may be so severe, we won't be able to endure watching it? That they may have such a severe trial, they will lose their faith altogether or wander away from God? Are we afraid that during their trials others may look at us and wrongly judge our parenting skills?

Let's look at each of these things: pain, fear, and pride. They all have one thing in common. These are *my* issues. That's why spiritual parenting is about the kind of person I am as a parent. These are things that I need to confess outright when I see them begin to reveal themselves. I need to take responsibility for the root causes of why I sometimes sabotage this environment in my home.

5. BUILD AN INTENTIONAL REFUGE IN THE FAITH COMMUNITY

It's imperative that [parents and children live] in close proximity to the faith community, because the world is hostile [toward faith. Families will need] a reprieve. Children especially will need a place where they can take the pieces of their armor off and simply remember who they are. A moment where they're not the alien. In this place, they gain strength. As parents we must be wise to understand that our children will bear the marks of the world's harsh conditions, and therefore we must make provisions for a different kind of community. A community of refuge.

I've had to consider in each season of my children's lives what this would look like. As we participated on weekends at church, as they got involved in small life groups during the week, as we rearranged summer plans in order for our kids to go to camp, as we sought to bring mentors and spiritual family into their daily lives, as we considered sacrifices that we would need to make in order for community to happen in our home—all of these things needed to be made our primary focus.

How would we spend our money in order to make these things a priority? One thing we did was choose to go without some luxury that we desired in order to send our kids to camp with our church group. It would have been easy to say that we couldn't afford it at the moment, but because faith community was a value, we set aside a little money each month to make this a priority.

How would we rearrange our home in order that community could occur more naturally? Well, we decided to turn our garage into a youth lounge where anyone could come at any time. We left the doors open, put in a TV and a sofa, stocked a small fridge with food and drinks, and welcomed community into our lives. And boy did they come! We used our guest room for individuals to stay for a season, while they were in transition. These were mature Christian models for our children to live among.

These types of decisions must be made swiftly and with intentionality. The opportune times we have been given will evaporate without us even noticing! [Encourage every parent to ask], "How will I intentionally and strategically set up an environment where my children will be a vital part of a faith community?"

6. ENGAGE IN A FAMILY SERVING EXPERIENCE

The critical question that service asks is simply, "What needs to be done?" This is one of the best questions [parents can teach their] children to ask. To have them walk into any room, situation, or relationship and

ask this will change the way they see their world. It's simple. It's profound. Yet this is a posture that will *not* naturally be cultivated in your children unless you set out on an intentional course, making it a priority.

Recently we offered a “serve experience” for our families at our church. We put together individual packets for our families so they could have their own “What needs to be done?” experience. As each family participated in the elements included in the packet, they were guided through reading Scripture, praying, and then driving in their cars or walking through their neighborhoods.

I thought about myself—how many times had I jumped in my car simply with a destination in mind? Almost *every* time. Very seldom do people say, “Hey, let's just go for a drive.” It sounds like something from the 1950s. Just to *go for a drive* is almost unheard of these days. We use transportation as a means to get *somewhere*.

When we live simply as “destination people,” we're not able to ask, “What needs to be done?” Instead, we're asking, “How quickly can I get there?” or, “Who is getting in my way?” because we're probably late and stressed out. Unfortunately, when I do this, I miss out on all the things in between.

It's this “in between” that I wanted for my families in the drive that we asked of them. It allowed them to drive quietly for about fifteen minutes around their community and ask, “What needs to be done?” For me, this was an intriguing thought. I've lived in my own community for almost ten years now. Never once have I driven around for fifteen minutes and asked the question of what needed to be done. Further, I wanted to take my staff at church through this experience to see how it would work before we presented it to our families. They were my guinea pigs.

7. DWELL IN GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

I make a mistake when I think, “Of course I love my children,” and I don't count the cost of what that requires of me. In order to do this, it will be necessary for me to ask God every day to help me love my children the way He would love them if He were here physically parenting them. Wow!

I remember the first moments of holding my daughter and my son. There was this instant bond of love that covered us. In that moment, I knew I would do anything for those little babies. Each of them was so helpless and pure. Never would it have dawned on me to pray for God to *help me* love them. I simply thought I did. I didn't start seriously praying until they grew and I realized the enormous responsibility that was mine—either to shape their heart with love or to shape it with love's counterfeit, something that might look like love but failed to offer the full extent of what God intended.

[Some parents] may be tempted to think sacrificial love is running at a hectic pace to get their children to every sporting event under the sun, spending outrageous amounts of money on new clothes and trendy toys, or overcontrolling every detail of their lives so they won't make a mistake. Other homes have even more dysfunctional forms of counterfeit love, such as verbal abuse, manipulation, guilt, and treating children as peers. These are all counterfeits, because they are dictated by our agenda instead of God's value system.

Many of us were raised by parents who offered authentic love. The Greek word for this is *agape*—a love that is unconditional, self-sacrificing, and active. This kind of love is divine. Others of us were raised in homes where we were told we were loved but were neglected instead. As children this would have been very confusing for us—to hear one thing but experience another.

Still others of us, out of our love for our parents (who might not have been capable of *agape* love at the time) had to become the caregivers. Finally, some of us may have been raised in homes where words of love were

rarely, if ever, uttered. We may have known it was there (or not), but it would have made all the difference to have heard those words spoken.

Childhood wounds of love run deep. So deep that parents inadvertently pass them on from generation to generation unless they are diligent to unpack the heritage they have been given, take assessment, and allow God to create a different future through them.

Take a moment to reflect about the love in your home of origin. Whether you had a home full of love or whether you did not, you can experience God's love and learn from it. You can receive the love that God wants you to offer to your children. [The fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters in your ministry can receive the same love—unconditionally.]

At every opportunity, you're doing all you can as a ministry leader to shape the faith of the next generation through your local church. Your opportunity grows as you partner with parents to encourage and equip their spiritual influence at home.

***We will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power, and the wonders he has done ...
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.***

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