



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

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“Will Our Children Have Faith?”

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The question in our title, from the book of the same name by John Westerhoff,¹ is one we suspect every thoughtful, God-fearing parent asks at one time or another. We hope every congregation also asks it. To ask it is to suggest several things, not least the following.

First, to ask whether our children will have faith shows we are concerned about them and especially for what matters most for them, the things that last into eternity. We are saying something matters more than their developing athletic, musical, or dramatic skills; their test scores; or whether they are on fast tracks to well-paying jobs. This in no way devalues any of those things, but it does show we understand that none of them last. Matters related to faith do.

Second, to ask about the faith of our children is to express a commitment to helping them to develop mature faith. The Bible nowhere suggests that faith nurturing is easy. The word used in the most famous passage on the subject is “train” (Prov 22.6). Training by its very nature is not something to take lightly. Effort is involved.

Third, to ask about our children’s faith is to show concern for the church’s future. Among the things the story of God’s people shows is that his people are never more than one generation away from abandoning him—unless we take the task of passing on the faith seriously. Yes, parents are primarily responsible for nurturing their children, but no one who loves the Lord and his church should lack concern for who our children become. Failure to intentionally seek to develop faith in the rising generations is tantamount to a commitment to see the church of the future become weak or practically non-existent in our land.

Fourth, the question, “will our children have faith?” hints at the inadequacy all honest parents feel from time to time when they consider the enormity of the task before them. Child-rearing *is* hard work. Even in the best of situations, it is easy to lose

¹ John H. Westerhoff, III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012).

perspective, to feel that for every step forward you take as a faith-nurturing parent, you take at least one (if not two) backward.

In light of these matters, we should remember some important aspects of the process of child nurturing.

First, remember that parents are also recipients of God's grace. We may fail in different ways, but we are not alone in being imperfect. Even if they never appear to admit it, even the experts have some growing to do and need grace.

Second, remember that children are individuals with minds—and agendas—of their own. God no more created them to be robots than he created you that way. Just as you cherish your freedom—remember when you were trying to get out on your own?—so they cherish theirs. And sometimes their choices will frustrate what you want. That's reality, but it can also be a comfort when we are tempted to dwell on where we've gone wrong.

Speaking of going wrong, it's also important for most of us to remember that we are probably better parents than we sometimes think we are. If we are committed to seeking God's reign first (Matt 6.33), and if we demonstrate that commitment in our efforts to nurture our children's faith, we will generally see good efforts pay off. That's the proverbial truth expressed in Proverbs 22.6 and is especially so if we keep in mind that our aim is to see our children have their own faith, not merely imitate our own. They might not follow the same course we did, or the one we would choose for them. But that's not really what we should want anyway. Our goal is for them to develop their own mature faith. Countless examples throughout history show that, where God-fearing parents have been committed to that goal, strong faith resulted in the children more often than not.²

"Will our children have faith?" It's a good question. The answer is found in our commitment to realizing that goal.

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² Westerhoff's terminology is helpful, distinguishing between *inherited/indoctrinated* faith and that which is *owned*. Our aim for our children should be for the latter to characterize them.