

## **“Hands-On” Parenting**

One of the more alarming statements ever to come to my ears was from a father who said of his early teenage child, “We’re letting her decide about coming to worship. We don’t want to push her.” The idea behind this theory of child-rearing was that by “forcing” the child to come to worship and Bible classes, the parents would give her a bad taste and turn her away from God. Pardon my blunt speech, but this was and still is utter foolishness! Did that parent allow his daughter at that age to decide whether or not she would attend school? Did he and his wife allow their child to determine without restriction what she would eat every day? In other words, if she wanted ice cream and cookies at every meal, did she get them? Of course, we know that the daughter was not allowed to make these two latter decisions; and while it’s great for parents to care about the development of the mind and body of a child, whatever happened to taking the reins of parenthood and directing the development of that youngster’s soul?

Digging beneath the surface of this situation, the words “force” or “push” may actually have represented that parent’s own attitude toward serving God. Perhaps he himself felt forced or pushed. Most likely, he needed to do some serious self-examination of his own heart (II Corinthians 13:5). That would be something that each of us parents should consider. Is the idea of “forcing” a child to come to worship and get involved in activities of the church a notion in that child’s head or in ours?

Worshipping and serving God is a privilege and joy. The Psalmist wrote, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 122:1). If that feeling of honor and joy fills the parents’ hearts, it will flow over into the hearts of the children.

How do we want our children to grow up? Do we want them to become Christians? Do we want them to grow as Christians, being faithful in worship and active in the work of the church? Do we want them to go to heaven? We parents must obey the Gospel, grow in the Lord, be faithful in worship and active in the work of the church. In short, if we want them to be active and ultimately to go to heaven, we ourselves must be active. We must bring them to worship, not just drop them off and leave. We must bring them to Bible classes while going to our own classes and then talk with them about what everyone learned during the class sessions. We must bring them to activities of the church, taking leadership ourselves wherever and whenever possible. We must lead them in Bible study and prayer at home. Trying to get them to do things that we ourselves are not willing to do may indeed appear to be “forcing” them. In most cases, children want to be like their parents. If their parents show little devotion to God, the chances are that the children will follow suit.

“Hands-on” parenting means giving our children the spiritual direction they need. It is not backing away from the small child or even the teenager and crossing our fingers in hopes that they’ll obey the Gospel and be faithful. Paul instructed fathers to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4). The Greek word translated “bring up” is a present active imperative verb. An imperative is a command. It is a command that is to be continuously obeyed. Parents, in this particular case, fathers, are to get their hands on the spiritual direction of their children to be sure that they are being trained in the Lord and urged to faithfully abide in His Word. One can only do that by being faithful himself and then actively involving his family in the worship of and service to the Lord.

Space does not permit a recounting of conversations I’ve had with parents who wished they had taken a more active role in the spiritual direction of their children when they were young and at home. Suffice it to say that these conversations have been many in number. Parenting is not a spectator sport. It is an active commitment to the development of a child. We attend their ball games and band concerts. We participate in their school fundraisers. We interact with their teachers and make sure that they get their school homework done. We play with them, take them to movies and the mall. We eat with them and tell them “good night” at the close of each day. What are we doing to help them go to heaven? It is our job as parents to take a firm hold of our family’s spiritual direction and, with hands on the Word of God and hearts focused on heaven (Colossians 3:1-2), actively lead the way to eternal life.