

Ten (well...Twelve) Commandments of Raising Faith-Filled Kids



Below are the ten most important things that Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick wants to tell parents (even parents in her own congregation) as they work to strengthen the spiritual lives of their children. I have added a few of my own to her list as well.

1. Faith is not passed like a football or created from nothing. Faith is nurtured. Faith is not something that you pass to your children like a quarterback handing off a football to a running back. And parents don't create faith. Faith comes from God, and God has placed the seed of faith in each child. Your job is to nurture that faith.

2. YOU, not the church, are the primary religious educator for your children. Yes, the church serves as a resource for teaching your child about the Bible, worship, theology, and even religious history. But even if a child never misses a week of Sunday school, there is never enough time in that once a week class to reinforce and build upon the lessons of scripture and faith that children have the potential to learn

3. It is okay not to know the answers to your children's questions. The very fact that they are asking questions which you struggle to answer shows that they are working through their own faith and understanding of the Bible. No one (not even your pastor) knows the answer to every question. This is an important lesson that we can teach children as we show them how to find the answers to their, and our, questions about faith and the Bible. The church can serve as a resource to help you answer your children's questions.

4. You are responsible for building an adult religious life outside of your children. Many parents choose to return to the church and to religious practices once they have children of their own. Most often, then, their faith life and practice revolves around the religious upbringing of their children. As an adult, though, there is a level of nurture and spiritual development that you yourself can benefit from. Without taking that next step in building their own faith, adults can very easily find their lives void of a mature faith life once their children are grown.

5. Your children sitting near me in the pew and making noise are NOT bothering me. While I am a big fan of teaching children to respect the time and space of worship, the normal noises that children make in worship are not distracting. They are signs of a church that is alive. While I can totally relate to being distracted by one's own child in worship, I would remind you that they will only be children for a season. If you want a teenager who will sit next to you in worship and an adult child who will sit next to you in worship, for a few years you will need to have a child sitting next to you in worship.

6. Share the story of your family's faith with your children. Talk to your children about the church in which you were raised. If you and your spouse came from different traditions, talk with them about that. If their grandparents are part of a different kind of church or religion, help your child understand the differences so that they can value the differences. If you have adult siblings who practice faith differently, don't

pretend that you are all the same. Certainly don't belittle or criticize other traditions in your family, but help your children learn how we can value traditions that are not our own

7. Think very carefully and intentionally about the decisions you make for your children and family that may keep them from regular religious practice. It is too simple to try to blame the trend of extracurricular activities held on Sundays on athletics. There are a myriad of decisions that families today have to make that did not face us even a generation ago, because the Christian community no longer dictates the way the rest of the culture operates. Today, to identify and live as a practicing Christian often means that we have to go against the tide of the culture in which we are raising our children. Consider how having that conversation with your child will help them understand the importance of faith to your life as a family, even though it may mean that they have to give up some other opportunities.

8. Don't be so afraid of the elements within the Christian tradition that you disagree with that you neglect to teach them how to value the rest of the tradition. If you as a parent are concerned about the way the church treats women, excludes groups of people, aligns itself too closely with certain political parties... then raise children to understand Christian faith in a different way. Find a Christian tradition that values the things that you value, knowing that the Church is always changing and growing. Help raise children who can be a part of that change and growth.

9. All religious resources (books, videos, curriculum, radio, etc.) are not made equally. Just because something is religious and is illustrated for a child does not mean that it is going to teach your child the things that you would teach them. This is true no matter what end of the religious spectrum you are on. You would never intentionally give your child a math, science or history book that had mistakes or misrepresentations in it. Be

as mindful of the religious resources you give them as well.

10. Being a part of a Christian (or any faith community) is about more than providing religious education for your children – it is how we teach them to value community. For a while, my son was concerned that classmates of his did not go to church, and I could tell that it upset him. Knowing that he was most likely not worried about their immortal souls I asked him what he thought they were missing by not going to church. He summed it up pretty well – the family. Community is really the first and most sustaining thing that children identify with church, and it shapes their faith in ways that simply taking a class or reading a book cannot.

11. Statistically you get what you are. I have written about this before as well, but it bears repeating. While we all have anecdotal evidence of people discovering or deepening faith significantly in adulthood, sociological studies of youth have shown that children rarely surpass the faith life and spirituality of their parents. They will come to value what you have taught them to value through not just your words but your actions. They will read the Bible if you are reading it with them. They will give of their talents and gifts to the church if they have seen you do that as well. You, as their parent, are in the position of greatest influence to raise a child who will become a faithful and spiritually mature adult.

12. There is no special encyclopedia for raising children in faith. I think that parents are often afraid that they are missing the book that has all the answers. There are no absolute answers. But, most importantly, there is the journey, and the questions, and the willingness to make faith and spirituality a central part of your life and your children's lives.