



Helping Kids Live Holy Lives

Written by Kathy Creasy

As a child when I responded to situations in anger I can remember my Dad saying to me, “I don’t believe you are sanctified.” I was sanctified. God had set me apart for holy living but neither Dad nor I had a thorough understanding of God’s sanctifying work in my life. And so in those moments I often became discouraged and doubted that I would ever be able to measure up to the holy life that God intended for me.

Through years of actively engaging with God in His continual work of sanctifying me I have learned that sanctification is not just the moment when God set me apart for the purpose of living a life that is holy and pleasing to Him. It is a process that I must engage in with God daily if transformation that results in Christ-likeness is accomplished.

This is such an important lesson for children to learn. Often when believing children experience the inner conflicts that Paul describes in Galatians 5:17 they doubt their salvation and their ability to live lives that are pleasing to God just as I did. But sound biblical teaching, Spirit-led ministry, and loving accountability can bring children to a thorough understanding of the sanctification process. They can fully comprehend God’s sanctifying work then knowingly and willingly engage with God in the sanctification process.

What is the child’s part in living holy lives that are pleasing to God?

- A believing child can learn to yield self-will to God, to give him lordship in particular areas of their lives. (Stories that illustrate this truth include the story of Simon Peter obeying Jesus’ command to let down his net on the other side of the boat [Luke 5:4-9]. *“Nevertheless at thy word, I will let down the net”* Luke 5:5, KJV. The story of Jesus obeying His Father’s will in the Garden of Gethsemane, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done,”* Luke 22:42, NIV.)
- Through a time of repentance each day, children can cleanse themselves from sinful thoughts, desires, attitudes, and actions (Psalm 139:23,24) so that they can become “vessels of honor” (2 Timothy 2:20, 21; 2 Timothy 3:17).
- Children can work with God in the process of spiritual growth by participating in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, reading God’s Word, worship, service, fasting, solitude, etc.

- Children can learn what temptation is and how to respond to temptation. They must know through biblical teaching that temptation is not sin; it is an invitation to sin. (The story of Jesus' temptation by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 illustrates this.) Children can understand that their response to temptation determines whether or not the temptation becomes sin. They can say "no" to the invitation to sin.
- Children can understand why they sometimes "give in" to temptation. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;" (James 1:14, 15, NKJV). This verse explains that when we give in to temptation and sin it is because there is a wrong desire within us that draws us toward sin. So temptation can be used to help children understand the wrong desires that are in their hearts, confess them and turn away from them.
- Children can learn to respond correctly to temptation. Children, as well as adults usually experience shame when they are tempted to sin. This shame causes them to feel alienated from God. Hebrews 4:15, 16 tells us what to do when we are tempted, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need,"* NIV. Jesus was invited to sin just like children are. In fact, every temptation that children experience He experienced as well. Yet, Jesus did not sin. So when children are tempted to sin, they do not have to accept feelings of shame. They do not have to hide their temptations from God. The Bible tells them what to do-- go to Jesus. He will help them say "no" to temptation.
- Children can learn to respond correctly when they sin. Sin is disobeying God's laws, giving in to temptation. Even after we become Christians and are set apart to live lives that are without sin, we will continue to sin. 1 John 1:8 reminds us that, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* Isaiah 64:6 tells us that all of our righteous acts (even the good things we do) are like filthy rags. Children will sin and they must know what they are to do. The story of the lost son provides a concrete illustration of what the child is to do when he sins. After wasting all his inheritance in wrong living the lost son said, *"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you,'"* Luke 15:18, NIV. When children sin, they can understand that their sin is against God. They can go to Him and ask forgiveness, just as they would go to their earthly father. What did the father do when his lost son asked forgiveness? Yes, he forgave him and restored him to the family. Children can understand that when they admit their sin to God he forgives and restores them to a right relationship with him.

Believing children who are not taught these truths will never know the intimate, victorious, and sanctified life God has prepared for them. Their discouragement will lead to a Christian life filled with guilt, shame, and alienation from their loving heavenly Father. Let's love our children enough to teach them the biblical truths of living a sanctified life so that they can experience the joys of living a life that is holy and pleasing to Him.