

Developing Character and Faith That Lasts

Article

In our Western society, the daily pressures mount to help our children excel in school, in athletics, in service projects . . . to “build a résumé” that one day will help them get into the right schools, help them land that first job, and get them started on a productive adult life.



With the rise of social media comes increased opportunities for our children (and ourselves) to self-promote and be compared to others. The pressures in these “social spaces” are usually toward presenting only the most appealing version of our “self” to the world.

If we, as parents, are not careful, we become accomplices in setting our children on a path toward an inordinate preoccupation with “the self” and worldly accomplishment. But do we want our children’s “identity” to be built on how they perform or on their identity as a child of God? If we start our children on the wrong path, the world is happy to push them in that direction, reinforcing the belief that accomplishment and promotion is what really matters.

But is this really how we can best prepare our children for their adult years?

Wouldn’t you rather have a child whose identity is in Christ, and who grows into an adult that exhibits the “fruit of the spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23)? When people interact with your child and see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, wouldn’t you feel that your child is ready to find his or her way in the world?

The Holy Spirit brings the fruit into our lives, but as parents we can help our children’s hearts be attuned to the Spirit as we focus on character formation. As parents, we need to help our children develop the inner qualities that will serve as a foundation as they mature into honorable and godly adults.

If our children develop an honorable and godly character, they will be prepared to face adversity with perseverance; selfishness or rudeness with kindness. When they are attacked in some way, they will be able to restrain their reaction with self-control. At school, in the neighborhood, in group activities, they will become an instrument of God’s kingdom at work.

Shaping our children’s character is not a check-the-box process. It is an ongoing effort to truly understand the child, discover areas of great potential and concern, and then provide guidance through activities that help mold that character into what God desires

Each child is different; as parents we need to help each child develop God-given gifts and skills, while helping the child turn away from areas that run counter to God’s desires.



In this section of the Aslan Academy, you will learn about developing character in the following areas:

- Integrity
- A teachable spirit
- Self-discipline
- Compassion
- A servant's heart
- Courage
- Faith
- Joy

Helping to shape your child's character is a critical part of your child's continued spiritual growth. This section of the Aslan Academy builds on the excellent work by John and Susan Yates, as described in their book *Character Matters! Raising Kids with Character That Lasts*.

A significant percentage of children raised in church-going homes drift away from faith as they go from high school through the college years. Simply sharing biblical knowledge and "dragging them to church" won't necessarily instill in them a strong yearning to know God and to follow Him as they become independent young adults. But if children, being led by their parents, have the chance to fully understand the important elements of a godly character and what it means to live an honorable and godly life, they will be more prepared to enter the pressure-cooker world and be able to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ.

A recent study was conducted on Christian students transitioning to college, seeking to understand the most important influences on shaping their faith¹. From choices of friends inside their youth group, friends outside of their youth group, youth leaders, parents, and adults in their congregation, the students chose parents as the number one influence. In fact, as pointed out in the Aslan Academy resource *Sticky Faith*, one study concluded that the most important influence in shaping the spiritual life of a child is the spiritual life modeled and taught by his or her parents². So character formation is not just for the children. As you as a parent go through these resources and seek to build a godly character in your children, examine yourself and seek God's guidance for your own ongoing character development.

This section builds on the earlier discussion of "heart change." As a child's heart begins to change, the child will become more interested in becoming the person God wants him or her to be. Without heart change, children may learn to "follow the rules" or have decency and manners, but they will miss the big picture of God developing them into the individuals He wants them to be. As parents, focusing on character, rather than selfish promotion and worldly accomplishment, will give children the best opportunity to fulfill God's plan for them. Then, in whatever setting, they will be effective and godly models, maybe even leaders, exhibiting a godly character for others.

Notes:

¹ Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 19–23.

² Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

