

Introduction

Intentional Parenting to Disciple our Children

Why do young people walk away from their faith when they leave home?

Key reasons include their lack of strong faith as a child and their parents not having lived a vibrant faith. Parents tend to focus, almost by default, on raising kids who will exhibit good behavior, succeed in school and eventually in employment, and become decent citizens. If they accomplish this, most feel, they have parented well.



While these are important outcomes, they are not the most important. What do I desire most for my children? For them to grow in the knowledge and love of their Savior Jesus Christ and articulate, defend, and joyfully live out their faith in whatever calling God has for them. Helping disciple our children on this journey should be a parent's urgent priority. Deuteronomy 6:5–8 tells us that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, and commit wholeheartedly to God's commands. We are to repeat these commands again and again to our children when we are home, on the road, when going to bed and getting up.

Proverbs 22:6 notes that we parents are to train our children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not turn from it. The Bible is clear that parents are chiefly responsible for helping their children become effective disciples. The church can help. Youth groups can help. Godly friends can help. But parents are on the front line, and they need help.

Parents deal with so many seemingly urgent and important things—managing their jobs, helping kids with school, taking them to sports, music, or play practices, church activities, hobbies, vacations . . . At times, just surviving the daily grind can seem like an impossible goal.

But if we fail to intentionally prepare the hearts of our children to fall in love with the Creator of the universe and find joy in following Him, our work as parents will fall dreadfully short of God's plan for us to lead our children. Likewise, as a church, if we neglect the work of equipping parents to disciple their children, we have forfeited a foundational responsibility.

Recent studies from a variety of reputable sources have confirmed that parents, in general, are not properly preparing children to have a solid faith. Here are just a few summary comments:

Not surprisingly, homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children. Homes modeling vibrant faith do. So these young adults are leaving something they never had a good grasp of in the first place. This is not a crisis of faith, per se, but of parenting.¹

The drop-out problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it's a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.²

If parents have a vibrant, strong faith and model that faith for their children, it is much more likely for those children to develop a similar vibrant, strong faith that is maintained throughout their lives.

The culture of a typical middle school, high school, or university seems almost designed to pull children away from their faith. With the plethora of information on the web and through influential messages on TV, movies, music, and other entertainment options, it is more important now than ever for parents to help children fully understand and defend their beliefs. The world is intentional about worldliness. Parents need to be intentional about discipling their children.

Unfortunately, churches are not, and cannot, fulfill the role of discipling our children. Even churches that make this a priority will get a small percentage of a child's time during the year. Without a parent being fully engaged, a child is left to be pulled away in the general cultural tide. To help address this urgent need for discipling our children, the C.S. Lewis Institute has created the *Aslan Academy*, a new program designed to



help parents understand the need for—and to provide access to—quality resources to begin and sustain the discipleship process with their children.

There are thousands of available books and other resources—many being helpful, many misguided or even harmful—on the subject of raising godly children. Sorting through the options can be a daunting challenge. At the *Aslan Academy*, we've identified a small number of highly effective resources to help struggling parents begin this exciting journey of discipleship with their children. And each month, through our new *Dawn Treader News*, we will highlight additional resources and provide helpful ideas for the upcoming weeks.

The *Aslan Academy* fills part of our larger vision of developing effective discipleship resources for people at each key stage of life. So much of a person's worldview and so many opinions are set before the teenage years, making it crucial for parents to recognize the urgent importance of shaping their child's spiritual growth. As parents, we can't guarantee our children's salvation, but we can prepare their characters and model a vibrant faith that can capture their imaginations and understanding.

For parents who have not been actively discipling their children, don't worry. It is never too late to start.

The *Aslan Academy* program will help you get started no matter where you are in this process.

The program features a biblical overview of the *Aslan Academy* approach and essential parent preparation, including the following:

- Reviewing the Fundamentals of Faith
- Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change
- Developing Character and Faith that Lasts
- Teaching the Bible to Your Children
- Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children
- Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith
- Family Read-A-louds for Inspiration and Discussion
- Listen and Learn on Their Own
- Monthly updates through the *Dawn Treader News*, with further resources to equip and challenge parents and children

*To best use the resources of the *Aslan Academy*, we've produced the *Seven Step Plan* to guide parents on this journey. Each step is broken down in categories that include: *Pray, Read & Study, Apply, and Family Activities*. Parents can work through these steps at a pace appropriate for their family.*

In addition, we've also launched ***Aslan Academy Gatherings***, designed to build a community of parents within a church body who will commit to proactively discipling their children. These regular gatherings are a place to share ideas, exchange resources, pray for families, and encourage one another. Children today are seeking authenticity in their lives and most desire to be challenged. Developing a community of parents who share a real commitment to discipleship can not only dramatically improve their children's lives, but also change the overall culture of the church. These gatherings can be led by children's directors on church staffs or by committed parents within churches or in small groups. C.S. Lewis knew the importance of helping children learn and grow in their faith. Lewis's *Narnia* series has proven to be one of the most enduring and helpful tools for children to see insights into God's story. These stories are included in the *Aslan Academy* reading recommendations, as well as discussion guides that will help parents reinforce Lewis's core messages.

Lewis's example helps us extend our reach beyond our own children. He spent countless hours responding to letters from children³, and his care and love for these children—most whom he never even met—can inspire us as we focus on being intentional with our own children and with others in our extended families, our churches, or our neighborhoods. Toward the end of his life he wrote to a child, “If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.”⁴



For parents, or grandparents who can play the role, the process of discipling their children should be one of excitement and joy, helping their children come to understand God's nature, His plan for us, and His power to help us live bold, fruitful lives. To walk with a child and help that child learn to love God and then see that love unfold for many years is something we all want to experience. No matter where you are in that process, we believe the *Aslan Academy* can equip and encourage you to be more effective in that journey.

Notes

1 Focus on the Family Findings, “Millennial Faith Participation and Retention,”

http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/~media/images/about-us/focus-findings/FF%20-%20Millennial%20Faith%20Retention%20FINAL.ashx, August 2013, 4.

2 David Kinnamen and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

3 C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

4 C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 1474.