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Introduction

YOU MAY HAVE wondered about the scriptural soundness of the title *How to Bring Your Children to Christ . . . and Keep Them There*. Of course, any theologian will tell you that we can't "bring" our children to Christ, and neither can we "keep them there." Both are strictly the work of God's grace. However, my alternative title was *How to Biblically Plant the Seed of the Everlasting Gospel in the Hearts of Your Children, Having Complete Assurance That God is Faithful and Will Save All Who Call Upon His Name . . . Knowing Also That in His Great Goodness He Will Keep Them from Falling, Presenting Them Faultless Before the Presence of His Glory with Exceeding Joy*. That was rather unwieldy, so I took the liberty of using a shorter title.

While there is no sure-fire formula to secure the salvation of any human being, the Bible assures us that if a child truly repents and trusts the Savior, God will begin a good work in him that He will complete. Our role as parents is to

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ensure that he is truly born of God, rather than of the will of man. Too many within the Church think all that is necessary for any child to be saved is for him to “ask Jesus into his heart.” That may sound like good doctrine, but it’s not biblical. This misunderstanding of the necessity of genuine conversion usually comes from an unawareness of the reality of false conversion.

After I had spoken at a church recently, a woman excitedly told me that her eight-year-old had been eyeing the communion juice. She informed him, “You can’t take communion until you have Jesus in your heart”—he then “asked Jesus into his heart” so he could have the juice.

While many of today’s converts come to Jesus for the “juice” of promised benefits, the biblical motive for coming to the Savior is that we have sinned against God, and therefore need mercy. Someone once said, “The most important thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along without them.” That’s true...in this life. We do want our children to be able to stand on their own two feet. However, there is something infinitely more important: where they will spend eternity—in heaven or in hell. A misunderstanding of biblical conversion can do great damage to that cause.

Anyone, including a child, who comes to Jesus must have knowledge of sin and exercise biblical repentance. When a child fails to find that place of true repentance, we shouldn’t therefore be surprised when he “falls away” from

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the faith as he encounters the temptations of the world. My prayer is that this publication will help you guide your children toward true conversion.

The intent of this book, however, isn't simply to help you teach your children about the things of God. It is my hope that God will use this book to raise up laborers—a generation who will carry out the Great Commission.

For that reason, we also recommend a companion publication called *The Way of the Master for Kids*. This book teaches children how to memorize the Ten Commandments in only five minutes, so they will remember them for life. It also shows them how to refute the theory of evolution, prove the existence of God, and answer questions such as “Who made God?” and “Why is there suffering?” Your children will not only understand salvation, but be able to share and defend their faith.

May God bless you and give you wisdom as you instruct your children in the most important of life's issues.

Chapter One

Perhaps a Six-Foot Drop

SOMETHING WONDERFUL happens when a giraffe is born. It drops about six feet to the ground, stands up, wobbles for around an hour, and then begins walking behind its mother. No diapers. No potty training. No learning to crawl and then walk. It has arrived, and in one hour it's ready to go.

Why couldn't it be that way for people? Human offspring are virtually helpless until they are eighteen years old. Perhaps if there were a six-foot drop at birth...

The fact that our children are helpless, however, does not mean that we as parents are. In His Word, God has given us plenty of assistance to guide us as we steer our children through their often tumultuous teens to become godly young men and women.

My wife, Sue, and I raised three children. When they were young, sincere folk warned us that we should expect our kids to become rebellious during their teenage years. It didn't happen. They never brought us a moment of grief,

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and we believe this was simply because we adhered to certain guidelines and principles from God's Word.

Of course, these principles are not an absolute guarantee that children won't become rebellious and turn their backs on the things of God. But they worked for us, and it is our earnest prayer that they work for you and those who are most precious to you.

Perfect Timing

On a flight from Los Angeles to Atlanta, Georgia, I spoke to the man seated next to me and shared a little about the television show that I co-host with Kirk Cameron. He mentioned that he had studied psychology, so I said, "Hey, Steve. I've got a question for you in light of your interest in psychology. Kirk and I often ask this question of people on our TV show. What do you think is on the other side... what do you think happens after you die?"

He thought for a moment, then answered, "Nothing." I asked, "Are you an atheist?" He replied that he was, so I said, "Could you believe me if I told you that this plane came together by accident? Its jet engines, windows, seats, and wings were not built; they came from nothing and fell together." He actually said he could believe that! With that answer, I decided it was best to quickly move from his professed intellect to his conscience, and went through the Ten Commandments with him. (Holding up God's holy standard will show a self-righteous person that he isn't as good as he

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thinks he is—a principle we'll look at in-depth later in the book.)

After realizing that he had broken four of the Ten Commandments, he admitted that if God were to judge him by that standard, he would end up in hell. When I asked, "Does that concern you?" he quickly answered that it didn't concern him at all.

I then told him about a friend of mine who at the age of twenty learned he had terminal cancer. His other friends advised him to enjoy his last six months by spending it with prostitutes. He wasn't interested, because he had something stronger than his sex drive—it was his will to live. A cry came from his heart, *Oh, I don't want to die!*

By this time the passenger seated next to Steve had tuned in, so I pointed to him and said, "God has given you that same will to live." I looked at the professing atheist and earnestly said, "He has also given you the will to live, Steve." Just then the plane, which had begun a slow descent, suddenly revved its engines, and in a split second changed to a steep ascent. This had the terrifying effect of throwing the passengers into a momentary, nauseating weightlessness. Faces were filled with alarm and several passengers shouted out in fear. I looked at Steve and commented, "That sure kicked in the will to live." Stunned, he replied, "Absolutely!"

The timing was perfect. From that point on, he listened to everything I had to say, and even accepted one of my books. There are no atheists in an air pocket.

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I don't know if God caused the plane to do that at that precise moment, but there comes a time in the life of a Christian when "coincidences" occur so often, it becomes illogical to use the word. The timing was perfect, and that's the way God works. His timing is always perfect. He's never late for anything. What may seem to be too late, isn't. Red Seas can be opened, lions' mouths can be shut, and even the dead can be resurrected. Nothing is ever hopeless, because with God nothing is impossible.

No one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him.

So you don't want to run ahead of the Lord and lead your children into a false conversion.

So never panic about the spiritual life of your children. Ask God for their salvation, then thank Him for it. Rest in the Lord. Trust Him. Faith never loses its peace; it sleeps even in a storm.

There is a right timing for the conversion of each of your children. That timing is in God's hands. They won't come to Christ before that time, because they can't. No one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). So you don't want to run ahead of the Lord and lead your children into a false conversion (a crucial principle that we will explore in Chapter 6).

I learned about God's timing the hard way. Back in my native country of New Zealand in 1982, I discovered the use of the Law (the Ten Commandments) as the God-given tool

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to reach the lost.¹ I had complete faith that He would open doors for me to teach this principle in the United States.² In 1987, through a series of circumstances, Sue and I found ourselves in Southern California, so I arranged to hold a seminar. Convinced that I was in the right place, I did a little publicity and sat back to watch God bring things together.

The day of the seminar, I arrived at the venue, expecting a crowd. See if you can guess how many people showed up. Zip. *No one*. Not a soul. I was at the right place, at the wrong time. I said to the man who drove me to the location, “This is God’s way of telling me that I’m running ahead of Him. I need to wait for His timing. Let’s get out of here.” We quickly closed the door and left.

Less than two years later, doors that I didn’t open suddenly opened for us. Without any effort on our part, we were invited to live in the U.S. where we were given a rent-free home, a car, and a generous salary (as pastor of evangelism), and all of our insurance was paid for us. That taught me that God has a right timing for certain things, and it is a big mistake to run ahead of Him, even if we are sincere.

God is not willing that your children perish. He wants them to come to repentance. Here’s how you can know that:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

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There are some who try to qualify this verse to fit a certain interpretation of Scripture, but at face value the words “any” and “all” include your children. Scripture also says that God wants *all* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Add to that the fact that Jesus said, “All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matthew 21:22), and there you have it. It is simple. Do you believe that when God’s Word says He wants *all* to be saved that He means *all*, and that *anything* you ask in prayer believing, you shall receive? These are promises from a God who *cannot* lie. So if there is any promise on which you and I should stand firm, it’s for God to work toward the salvation of our children.

I don’t believe in the “name it and claim it” prosperity message, which is motivated by covetousness. However, it is based on some truth. Jesus said, “Have faith in God.” If you doubt His Word, the Bible says that you are calling God a liar (see 1 John 5:10). Doubt produces fear, worry, and concern. It steals peace and joy. Faith, on the other hand, will actually *produce* peace and joy. The choice of whether to trust God is ours. When we ask for what is in accordance with His will, we can confidently trust God to be at work in the lives of our children, drawing them toward the Savior.

Think of it as you would a healthy pregnancy. The seed is first planted in the womb. Then God causes the miracle of gestation. During the growth period, all that is needed is for the mother to provide the proper nutrients for her

developing child, and to keep away from poisons such as drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. When the baby is ready, the birth will happen at the right time.

The Tragic Error

Jesus said that one must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). So let's now talk about this spiritual pregnancy. For your children to be born again, you want to be sure to plant the good seed of the pure Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). You also need to ensure that you stay away from toxins that will cause a stillbirth.

It's essential that you become familiar with the biblical reality of true and false conversion. Do not assume that everyone who names the name of Christ is genuinely saved. Many Christians make this tragic error.

Children are particularly vulnerable when it comes to false conversions. This is usually because parents and children's workers are not aware that there is such a thing as spurious (false) conversion. They have "zeal without knowledge." We may be zealous in our desire to fly a plane, but it is dangerous to do so without the right knowledge.

Having zeal when it comes to bringing our children to Christ is understandable. Each of us should rightly be concerned for their welfare—particularly their *eternal* welfare—so it makes sense that we want them to be converted at an early age. However, I have received numerous letters from grieved parents who say that their children were "con-

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verted” at a very young age, but have since strayed into drugs, alcohol, sex, etc., usually in their teenage years.

It is likely that these children had false conversions, a fact that was made evident when temptation came their way. A plant may seem healthy, but a burning hot sun will cause it to wither and die if it has a faulty root system or is in shallow soil.

Sue and I weren’t seeking a “decision for Christ” from our children. Decisions are easy to get. All you have to do is gather a group of children and ask, “Kids, how do you live forever?” “By giving your heart to Jesus!” “Who wants to give their heart to Jesus?” A sea of hands wave—fifty decisions. The problem is that they will be fine until teenage temptation reveals their unconverted condition. All this accomplishes is giving the children, and ourselves, a false sense of assurance.

In addressing parents, Dr. Robert A. Morey says,

Another possible snare you must avoid at all costs is the blind faith of some parents. Now, it is clear that Christian parents should desire that their children come to know and love the Lord Jesus early in life. This desire is one evidence that *they* are saved. A parent who claims to be saved but does not manifest any concern to see his children saved is no more saved than a stone.

While the desire to see your children saved is proper and necessary, some parents become so desperate

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to believe that their children are saved that they will grasp at anything. Even when their son or daughter openly denies the faith and engages in gross wickedness, they will still comfort themselves by saying, “Well, at least my son is saved. He may not act like it now but I know he is saved because he accepted Jesus when he was five years old. He doesn’t go to church anymore and married a Catholic but I still say he is saved.”

Instead of facing the reality that their child is on his way to hell, some parents will cling to false hopes so they can sleep at night. But instead of seeking their own psychological comfort, they should seek the conversion of their child by telling him the truth.³

The truth is that, for any child (or adult) to be saved, there must be an understanding of the nature of sin. He must turn from his sin and trust in Jesus to save him. Eternal life comes not from saying a prayer or making a decision, but from “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Genuine salvation must be a work of God. We can have as much a part in the spiritual birth of our children as we have in the planting of a tree. We can prepare the soil and

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water the seed, but it will grow only if God sees fit to cause it to do so. All we can do is make ready the soil of the child's heart, plant the pure seed of the Word of God, keep away harmful influences, and faithfully water it with believing prayer.

We'll look at the first step of preparation in our next chapter.