

FAITH: Parenting Skills That Encourage a Heritage of Faith
Leader's Guide

Checking Your Own Heritage

First, let's take a look at our own spiritual heritage. The following evaluation was posted online at www.focusonyourchild.com. Take a minute, follow the given instructions, and then we will discuss the exercise.

Spiritual Legacy Evaluation¹

Answer each question by circling the number that best reflects the legacy you have received from your parents. Then add up your score.

1. To what degree were spiritual principles incorporated into daily family life?

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Frequently
5. Almost always
6. Consistently

2. Which word captures the tone of how you learned to view/relate to God?

1. Absent
2. Adversarial
3. Fearful
4. Casual
5. Solemn
6. Intimate

3. How would you summarize your family's level of participation in spiritual activities?

1. Nonexistent
2. Rare
3. Occasional
4. Regimental
5. Active
6. Enthusiastic

4. How were spiritual discussions applied in your home?

1. They weren't
2. To control
3. To manipulate
4. To teach
5. To influence
6. To reinforce

5. What was the perspective in your home regarding moral absolutes?

1. If it feels good, do it!
2. There are no absolutes.
3. Let your heart guide you.
4. Dogmatic legalism
5. Moderate conservatism
6. Clear boundaries

Results:

Above 24:	Strong spiritual legacy
19 – 24:	Healthy legacy
14 – 18:	Mixed legacy — good and bad elements
10 – 13:	Weak spiritual legacy
Below 10:	Damaged spiritual legacy

Discuss the findings of adults about their own spiritual inheritances and then follow the instructions below and have them contemplate what “they will pass on.”

Have parents respond to the following statement from J. Otis Ledbetter and Kurt Bruner’s book, *Your Heritage*: ***“If we don’t intentionally pass a legacy consistent with our beliefs, our culture will pass along its own.”***

Preparing the Soil of Your Child’s Heart

Group Publishing CEO, Thom Schultz has written, *“Many Christian parents face a paradox: How can some children hear the good news of the Bible and believe, while others hear the same message and remain unaffected? While the process of faith may be miraculous, it is not entirely mysterious. Jesus explained it in His parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23). Teaching received without understanding kills the yield. Faith with shallow roots withers and dies. Distractions, worries and desires for other things choke the Word. But one who hears the Word and understands it bears fruit.”*²

The question, then, for parents, is “how do I ensure my child is fertile ground for the gospel?”

Let’s take a little different look at Matthew 13 (The Parable of the Sower) and discuss a parent’s ability to affect the soil of their child’s heart. Comments from Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible have been included.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
Matt. 13:19 (NIV)

Highway Soil – The word planted in this child’s heart is heard, but not understood, and Satan comes and snatches away what was sown.

Parental Lessons:

- Making sure your child has heard the Gospel is not enough.
- A passive approach to faith development is an aggressive approach to indifference.
 - “If we break not up the fallow ground, by preparing our hearts for the word, and humbling them to it, and engaging our own attention; and if we cover not the seed afterwards, by meditation and prayer; if we give not a *more earnest heed to the things which we have heard*, we are as the highway ground.”³
- A lack of understanding is an invitation to abandonment of ideals.
- Satan is looking for an opportunity to steal your child’s faith.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Matt. 13:20-21 (NIV)

Rocky Soil – The word planted in this child’s heart is heard, received with joy, but takes no root and fades quickly in light of persecutions.

Parental Lessons:

- Making sure your child has heard the Gospel is not enough.
- Short-term emotional intensity does not equate to long-term devotion.
 - “Where there is not a principle, though there be a profession, we cannot expect perseverance.”⁴
- The same word that delivers grace to the sinner, delivers persecution to the saint. Understanding and submission enable us to withstand the storms of life.
 - “Observe, persecution is represented in the parable by *the scorching sun*, (vs. 6), the same sun which warms and cherishes that which was well rooted, withers and burns up that which wanted root.”⁵

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Matt. 13:22 (NIV)

Thorny Soil – The word planted in this child’s heart is heard and even starts to grow, but gets choked out by the cares and enticements of the world.

Parental Lessons:

- Making sure your child has heard the Gospel is not enough.
- A parental emphasis on money, especially as a reliable problem solver, may cause your child to become spiritually unfruitful.
 - “Prosperity destroys the word in the heart, as much as persecution does; and more dangerously, because more silently: the stones spoiled the root, the thorns spoil the fruit.”⁶

- An active pursuit of materialism is > passive words of faith.
- The spiritual plan of the ruler of this world is to own the heart of your child.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matt. 13:23 (NIV)

Good Soil – The word planted in this child’s heart is heard, understood, takes root and bears fruit.

Parental Lessons:

- What a child hears AND understands is not soon forsaken.
- You can’t force fruit to develop, but you can nurture and care for the plant.
 - “He does not say that this good ground has no stones in it, or no thorns; but there were none that prevailed to hinder its fruitfulness. Saints, in this world, are not perfectly free from the remains of sin; but happily freed from the reign of it.”⁷
- Expect fruit, yet celebrate and encourage every piece you see.
- Resist the urge to compare a child with their siblings or other children.
 - “Note: Among fruitful Christians, some are more fruitful than others: where there is true grace, yet there are degrees of it; some are of greater attainments in knowledge and holiness than others; all Christ's scholars are not in the same form.”⁸

A Parental Emphasis

Twelve Characteristics

You may ask, “After learning to work the soil of my teen’s heart, what should I emphasize with him?” Walt Mueller, a renowned expert in parent and youth culture, wrote a letter to his daughter, Caitlin, shortly before her senior year in high school. In that letter he listed the twelve characteristics of godliness that he had hoped to pass on to her. These twelve characteristics are a great resource to us in our understanding of the substance of a heritage of faith.

[First and foremost, glorify God in everything you are and everything you do. Live for the one who died for you by turning to Him as the guide and director of all your thoughts, all your feelings, and all your actions. The world will encourage you to see yourself as “#1.” But don't be self-centered. You were made by God to be God-centered. Praise and glorify God by how you live, how you study, how you play, how you converse, and how you relate.

Second, strive to be consistent in your faith. If you are looking for models on how to talk about following Christ while actually living by other priorities, there's plenty out there. In fact, the church is increasingly marked by “dis-integrated” Christians. Ask God to help you look closely at your life each and every day. Ask him to expose those areas of your life where you must allow him to rule. Strive for a life of integration. Your faith should not be just one part of your life. Instead, it should guide, direct, permeate, and inform every area of your life - at home, at school, in the car, with your friends, on the athletic field, etc.

Third, be full of thanksgiving. Everything you have, are, and do is a gift from God. Don't think they come from you. Instead, realize that all the good gifts you experience are purely by the grace of God. And when you experience emotional, spiritual, or physical difficulty - and you will - be sure to thank God for those gifts as well. Why? Because He's gives you those difficulties as part of the refining process. He's growing your faith. Gratefully recognize the source of your blessings.

Fourth, develop and use discernment. Your life will be full of choices - many of them difficult. The world is encouraging you to make decisions based on what "feels good" to you at the moment. You're already surrounded by people who live that way. It will only get worse. Make all your decisions - what you listen to, what you watch, who you choose as close friends, who you marry, how you spend your time, what you do vocationally - on the basis of God's unchanging Word. Don't trust your changing feelings as a gauge to discover and do what seems right. Instead, study and follow God's Word so that you can choose to do what is right.

Fifth, live a life marked by grace. As your earthly parent, I must relate to you with the same measure of grace my heavenly father has given to me. Grace is undeserved favor. Its greatest expression came in the gift of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf - something we could never earn or deserve. Show that same grace to every person you encounter.

Sixth, continue to be a person of compassion. Go out of your way to love those who don't get too much love. Jesus was a friend to the friendless. He was sympathetic, kind and merciful. Do the same.

Seventh, always show humility. Don't ever believe that your talents, gifts, abilities, successes and achievements come from you. If anyone deserves a pat on the back for those things, it's not you. Don't ever allow yourself to be full of self-centered pride. Don't ever be puffed up by a false sense of your own self-importance.

Eighth, live a life marked by self-control. Rein yourself in and don't let the world set the agenda for how you live. The world will tell you how to live out your sexuality. The world will tell you how to view material things. The world will tell you how to treat other people. Sadly, the world will tell you that in these and all other areas you have the freedom to choose and use your own rules. But instead of living a life of excess, imitate Christ and live a life of discipline by striving to please God in these and all other areas.

Ninth, always, always, always respect and obey authority. God is your king. He has established authorities in your life who you are called to respect, honor, and obey as long as they don't require you to do something in opposition to God's will. Continue to respect, honor, and obey your teachers, your coaches and all others in authority.

Tenth, be a person marked by sexual purity. You get one shot on this one and one shot alone. Sadly, you get that one shot to follow God's will and design for His incredible gift of sexuality in a world that makes a joke out of God's sexual plan. Don't buy the lies that there are no rules. Stand firm on this because there will be opportunity for compromise and resulting regret. Decide now to live what you know to be true - trust and believe that God has your best interest in mind and he wants you to experience the joy of sexual fulfillment in the context of your life-long marital commitment to one person. You won't regret it!

Eleventh, maintain a strong sense of modesty. We live in a society that has lost all respect for modesty. In fact, the world around you will encourage you to "let it all hang out." Work to carefully, deliberately, and consciously honor God through what you say, how you act, and what you wear. Remember that in God's eyes - the only eyes you need to please - modesty, chastity, honor and restraint are all virtues.

Finally, never cease being fully dependant on God. Solomon wrote these wise words: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:6-7). There's nothing to add to that.]
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Like Walt Mueller, we should weave those qualities into the fabric of our lives and communication as well.

A Parental Checklist of Questions

Mueller uses a set of questions to check a parent's commitment to passing on a heritage of faith.¹⁰ Use these questions as a regular self-check for focus and accountability.

- Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?
- Do you love your neighbor as yourself?
- Are you modeling those priorities to the kids who live under this roof?
- Is that model clear and consistent to the point that they know where you stand on matters of right and wrong?
- When they fail, do you show them the same grace your Heavenly Father shows you every minute of every day?
- Are you praying for your children?
- Are you involved enough in their lives to know where they are struggling and where they are succeeding morally?
- Do you affirm them, compliment them and tell them you are proud when they make good choices?
- And, are you willing to speak up and lovingly challenge those assumptions and ideas they adopt that are contrary to God's standards for their lives?¹⁰

¹ From *Your Heritage*, by J. Otis Ledbetter and Kurt Bruner, Chariot Victor Publishing, a division of Cook Communications, Copyright © 1996 (as published at www.focusonyourchild.com)

² *Growing Faith-Full Kids*, by Thom Schultz, Focus on the Family, 2002, <http://www.family.org/fofmag/sh/a0022265.cfm>.

³ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible

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⁸ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible

⁹ *I LOVE YOU 12*, by Walt Mueller, is a letter written by Mueller, to his daughter at the beginning of her senior year in high school. This article is available in its entirety at the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding website, www.cpyu.org. It has been adapted and used here in abbreviated form.

¹⁰ *Living and Teaching Right from Wrong*, Walt Mueller, Copyright 2005, www.cpyu.org.