

Bringing Our Children to The Foot of the Cross

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By Kim Butts

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton wrote a sobering book entitled, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, in which they describe the current religion among the vast majority of youth in our nation. In the largest study ever conducted on the spirituality of U.S. teens, researchers pored over transcripts from written interviews with thousands of teens and follow-up face to face interviews with 250. Most identified themselves as Christians; however, there were also youth from other religious backgrounds, or who claimed to be non-religious. Researchers found that most teens were unable to adequately articulate their belief system, and the majority had never been asked questions about their own faith. The basic creed of the religious thought among teens in the United States appears to include the following:

- "A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

- God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when He is needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die."

Most teens in America today are not even thinking about living as disciples of Jesus, obeying His Word and living out His commands for the sake of His kingdom. My heart is grieved by this stark revelation, as well it should be. Basically, what the study reveals is that most teens believe God created the world, set it in motion and backed off...except when He is "needed." As God watches from a distance, He wants us to be good, moral people who are happy and who feel good about ourselves. Researchers interviewed teens who are completely disconnected from religion of any kind as well as many Christian teens who are very strongly grounded in their faith identity and are actively living as followers of Jesus. Unfortunately, the answers given by the Christian teens did not sway the final results of the study in any significant way. This revelation alone is enough to send every parent, teacher, pastor and youth leader to his or her knees in repentance.

Christian Smith has also written an article based on the book in which he states: "This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etc. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."

God was mentioned often in the study, but rarely was there any reference made by the young people to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. The importance of the Trinitarian nature of God has

diminished or even disappeared amongst teens in America. As one news editor notes, "What *Soul Searching* reveals is a generation of kids who claim to be Christian, but many of whose beliefs are not even remotely orthodox."

It is no wonder that truth is perceived as relative and not absolute. Many teens and even adults believe that anything is okay as long as no one gets hurt and they are happy. Recently, my husband spent time with a young Christian couple who wanted to get married. He was puzzled because they were attending a Bible believing church, but were living together while unmarried. When he talked to them about what the Bible says, they were shocked to find out that their living situation was not pleasing to the Lord. The question is, "*Why didn't they know this?*" Fortunately, they wanted to obey God and were more than willing to rearrange their living situation and cease their physical intimacy until after their wedding.

As we struggle with why our children are walking away from their Christian faith, living with their boyfriends or girlfriends, worshiping other idols as gods, etc., we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, look deep within ourselves to ask what has gone terribly wrong. Don't make the assumption that your child's faith is his or her own. Many of them may have some measure of their parents' faith...but this alone will not sustain them amidst the assault of the "religion" of the culture.

If our children are accepting a religion that feeds off of traditional religious roots but really looks nothing like what we have presumably taught them, how do we call them back to the Truth? If we have raised our children in the best way we know how before God, and they still choose to walk away, what steps do we take with God to draw their hearts back to His? The answers are far too complex for this short article; however, now that the alarm bell has rung, there are some basic steps that godly parents can and should take:

No Condemnation (Romans 8)

The first response of many parents tends to be an unproductive thought process which condemns: "I should have done a better job of teaching Scripture." "Maybe we should have done a better job with family devotions." "Why didn't I see this coming and do something about it earlier?" The enemy of our souls is very pleased with such accusations. He would keep us feeling guilty and miserable, rather than accepting the grace of God. He wants to keep us from moving forward in a positive way toward steps that will bring victory into our children's lives. No matter how far our children wander, they can be redeemed by the Holy Spirit and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of His kingdom! Of course it is better that they don't walk away from their faith in the first place; however, the reality is that the pull of our seductive culture is very strong and enticing. The need to fit in and to be like everyone else is strong in teenagers. They are being bombarded with technology, movies and music we couldn't even imagine when growing up. These things are not an excuse for failure to shepherd our children towards a genuine faith in Christ, but they do explain why a lot of unsuspecting Christian teens have been lured away from the Truth.

Prepare for Battle!

As I just mentioned, do not allow the enemy to condemn you for the unwise decisions your children make. He wants to take you down through your children, if he hasn't already won the battle with your heart and mind. If he hasn't been able to damage your life because of the quality of your character, he will start working on the hearts and minds of your precious children. Remember; do not allow their mistakes to be your fault. Confess anything you may have done to contribute to their struggles, and then allow the faithfulness and grace of God to remove that guilt from your heart!

Then, with that guilt covered, fight back by putting on the full armor of God *“so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints”* (Eph. 6:11-18). The devil won’t give up our children without a fight! If we are not prepared by God, and attempt to “fix” things on our own, we cannot win. But if we are clothed in His holy armor, the battle will be fought and won by the Lord.

Pray!

If ever there is a time for prayer to be our first response rather than our last resort, this is it! When our children have been drawn into worldly pursuits or thinking, it is not by our efforts that they will be snatched from the enemy – it is only by our fervent and heartfelt intercession. If we need to be drawn into repentance for our own actions, and the possibilities that we have also bought into the lie of our culture, then so be it! As we confess our weaknesses before God, He will remove condemnation and flood us with His grace and forgiveness: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Now we must earnestly seek Him for the hearts of our children. It is so important to pray the

plans and purposes of God for our children rather than for what we think is best. Sometimes a child must walk a difficult road in order for true transformation to take place. Praying the Word of God into their lives is asking Him to move in power, in agreement with His own perfect will. Here are a few to get you started:

“The One who calls (child’s name) is faithful and He will do it” (1 Thes. 5:24).

“...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in _____ will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

“And this is my prayer: that _____’s love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that _____ may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9-11).

Love Your Children Unconditionally

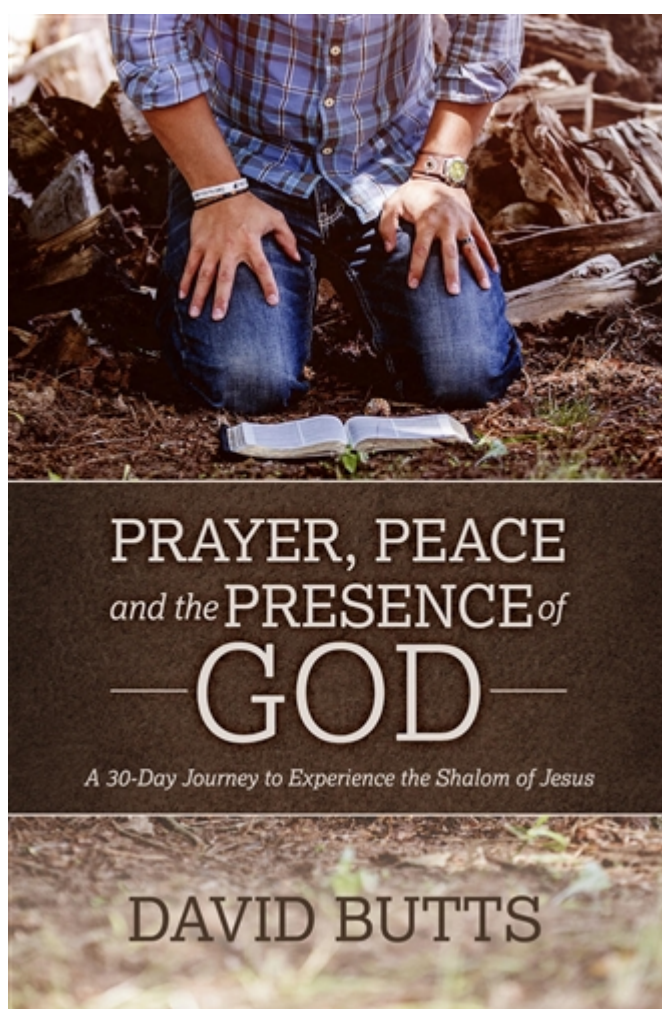
As parents, we must be able to separate our children from the sinful choices they may choose to make. If we only show them love when they do what we want and follow our expectations, it will be hard to keep their trust. We can speak the truth in love by sharing that we don’t approve of their choices or behavior; however, they must always know that we love them no matter what, and that we will be praying for them to walk in godly ways.

Know That God Is Able

It is time to bring our children to the foot of the cross. Our loving Father has their best interests at heart. He loves them even more than we do, and wants them to live in ways that bring honor to Jesus Christ. We must place our trust and confidence in God’s ability to redeem and restore what may be

broken or damaged in our homes and/or in the lives of our children. Jesus said, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me”* (John 14:1).

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).



PRAYER, PEACE, and the PRESENCE of GOD by David Butts

As believers, we are supposed to walk in the peace of Christ, yet we all have stressful issues and circumstances that rob us of this peace. Subtitled *“A 30-Day Journey to Experience the Shalom of Jesus,”* *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* powerfully encourages the reader on how to hold onto that

peace in any circumstance.

The author, David Butts (1953-2022), started writing this book and 10 days into it he got word that he was in stage 4 with a rare form of lymphoma. God allowed him to live in a greater way for five additional years of full-strength ministry. Dave has challenged readers in *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* to seek after His best life, no matter what it holds.

His 30-day devotional will encourage, inspire and challenge you that you, too, can experience and walk in the peace of Jesus no matter what circumstances you are walking through.

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