

Parents, teaching the Word to your own children requires faith and guts. Are you up to the challenge?

Faith & Guts

by ANDY BATES

The answer is the same as that which makes my faith strong: God's gifts in Word and Sacrament. When I attend Divine Service, when I attend a Bible class, not only does my faith benefit from it, but my family benefits from it. How can I forgive others if I don't experience it for myself? How can I teach God's Word faithfully to my family if I don't first learn it faithfully myself?

God's Word is very clear that the responsibility of teaching the Word to children belongs to parents: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). There's no denying that parents are given this responsibility by God when they become parents and are reminded of their important duty and vocation when they bring their child to the baptismal font to receive the gift of Holy Baptism. This vocation is not for wimps. But it isn't impossible either. Teaching the Word to your own children, especially teens, requires faith and guts.

The evolution of our culture has led us to think that teaching children should be left in the hands of professionals. Most parents don't have a degree in education, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't teach their children. Sure, parents should gain training to be better equipped to teach their children. That training comes in the form of faithful and regular study of God's Word. Showing up for Divine Service is a start. Add to that a faithful Bible study, and we're equipped

Expecting our first child in the coming months, my wife and I spend much time thinking and dreaming about who this child will become. Will he or she like the arts, sports or both? Will he or she be gifted in academics or need extra math classes and tutoring like Dad? As one who really likes to think things through thoroughly before embarking on something new, I've been giving a lot of thought to what it takes to raise a child in the one true faith. What should I be doing to give this child all that he or she needs to have a strong and sturdy faith that will endure whatever this world of craziness brings until the Last Day? What can I do to be certain that the promises God has given to me and all sinners will also be known confidently by my child?

with the Word of God and all that is promised in Paul's second letter to Timothy: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Children learn from the example of such faithful parents. After all the reading and investigating, the clear-



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est answer is this: The best way to get my child to be a student of God's Word and receive all the benefits that come with it is not to expect someone else to teach him or her, but rather to be a faithful student of the Word myself. The world says that I should let the professionals do the work and I can supplement their work at home with small things. But the truth is just the reverse: We, the parents, are the primary teachers, and other faithful Christians provide the supplemental learning.

Professor Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame, has some-

thing to say about American teen spirituality that seems pretty obvious: "The best general rule of thumb that parents might use to reckon their children's most likely religious outcomes is this: 'We'll get what we are.'" So what happens if that's really true?

I recently asked several families in our congregation to describe the benefits their children gained from their parents' faithful participation in Bible study. The response was overwhelming, especially for the families where the children are now adults. First, parents were better equipped, confident, and more likely to discuss Sunday school lessons and Bible stories on the way home and throughout the week. Second, children learned indirectly that Bible study was valued by their parents and thus learned to value the Word of God themselves.

God has given parents to teach the truth of His Word to the children entrusted to them. As my wife and I await the birth of our first child, we learn more each day about the many responsibilities that will come with being parents. Some seem overwhelming now, but I'm sure will become easier with practice. Each of the chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism begins with "As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household." God grant us the grace and the will to regularly study His Word at each opportunity given that we might be faithful in teaching it to our children and pass on the one true faith to the next generation. ✨

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