

TEACHING THEOLOGY TO CHILDREN

MARTY MACHOWSKI

Welcoming a newborn child into the world is one of life's great blessings. Along with the joys of parenting come the many demands that every parent knows: sleepless nights, feeding, comforting, changing diapers, and more. But in time, these things are eclipsed by the preeminent responsibility of parenting, which is teaching our children theology.

However, many parents don't know where to begin. For them, the word theology evokes an image of thick books filled with complicated words. But theology simply means "God study." So, teaching our kids theology (about God) is passing the truth we've received from Scripture on to our kids. There are two key elements in this undertaking – our instruction and our example.

A Visit with a Patriarch

"You can go in now," aunt Gertrude announced. My wife Lois and I were recently engaged, and it was time to meet her 104-year-old grandfather, Carl. I'd never met a centenarian before. The Rauch family attributed their salvation to Grandpa's prayers and example. His pronounced devotion to Christ undergirded the truth he passed on through his letters and testimony. It is said that people wanted to be with Grandpa from the time he got up in

the morning to the time he retired for bed because of the way his life and conversation testified to his love for Christ.

Lois introduced me as we approached Grandpa's bed and announced our engagement. Carl's warm face smiled as he took her hand and offered us his congratulations. With introductions complete, it was time for a theology lesson. Carl began a short survey through Scripture from memory, ending the lesson with sharing how he "longed to kneel at Jesus' feet."

Grandpa encouraged us to "Always make room in your home for Jesus. Just as Mary and Martha did whenever he passed by." Grandpa Carl's life demonstrated the two fundamental principles Scripture outlines for passing on our faith. First, to live a life worthy of the calling (testimony), and second, to teach your children about God (theology).

My single twenty-minute encounter with Grandpa Rauch (he passed on to glory a few months later) ignited a desire to imitate his life and follow his example to pass on theology validated by a life of devotion and prayer to my children and grandchildren.

*Teaching our kids
theology is passing
on the truth we've
received.*

Don't Just Teach It, Live It

This tandem strategy is outlined for us in scripture. Jesus taught the disciples theology while he lived a life of obedience and devotion to the Father. The apostle Paul said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul charged Timothy to follow this same pattern – to teach theology and set before the people an example (1 Tim. 4:11-13). "Persist in this," Paul said, "for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). This is also the tandem strategy God outlines for parents.

After Israel's exodus from Egypt, Moses charged parents with two commands. First, to love God with all their heart and live for him, and second, to teach the commands of the Lord to their children. These are the same two characteristics I observed in Grandpa Carl's life. Moses said:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love

the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

He's Not Just "The God," He's "Our God"

Notice how Moses emphasizes our relationship with God and makes it the top priority in passing our faith to the next generation. We are not just teaching a theology lesson; we are passing on our passion for God. The goal is to introduce them to "our God." Our worship validates the gospel message we proclaim. Also, Moses charges parents to be devoted to the Lord's commands and, by implication, to live them. Jesus affirmed the connection between our love for God and the life we live when he said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Therefore, teaching our children "diligently" (Deut. 6:7) involves formal training—like leading regular family devotions—and demonstrating a lifestyle of worship to undergird that teaching. The Apostle Paul said, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly," which involves "teaching" but also "singing with thankfulness to God" (Col. 3:16).

Beyond formal devotions, life presents many opportunities to talk about God. That is why Moses says whether we are in our house or on a trip somewhere, we look for ways to pass on our love for God and his Word. The more we love the Lord, the easier it will be for us to make him a regular, moment-by-moment part of our life, and the more our kids will embrace what we teach.

A Few Practical Tips

Don't hide your love for God from your kids. Talk about your relationship with God. Share the discoveries you make in scripture from your personal devotions. Show them the verse in the Bible and share how God is living and active in your life.

When the Holy Spirit convicts or encourages you through a Christian book you are reading, share it with your kids. When you hear a fantastic testimony that touches your heart, don't just tell all your friends; share it with your kids. Print out that encouraging email and bring it home to read after dinner. Our loving relationship with God authenticates the truth we share.

I can remember when my twins reached an age where it seemed good to begin teaching them theology (about God) more formally. I felt so ill-equipped for the task. Since then, it's been my goal to write books that parents can use to make teaching theology easier.

There are plenty of good Bible storybooks you can read to your younger children and easy-to-follow Bible studies you can use for older kids. You can review the Sunday message. Read through and teach them the Sovereign Grace *Statement of Faith*.

A great time to do family devotions is after dinner, before dessert. You're already gathered for the meal, and you can use ice-cream as leverage. If your devotions fall into a season of neglect, remember "the righteous falls seven times and rises again" (Prov. 24:16). Falling only becomes failure if you refuse to rise and keep going.

Remember that your devotions don't need to be fantastic. Shoot for faithful. While God calls us to do the work of planting the gospel and watering it with our prayers, he alone can make it grow (1 Cor. 3:7).

While my devotion to God hasn't reached the level where people want to be with me all day, I try to ensure my life is a living testimony of my love for Christ. I've failed to be consistent with family devotions during life's busy seasons. But, I've made it my goal to follow Grandpa's exhortation to "always make room for Jesus," knowing that all of life is a classroom and my children are always watching.

MARTY MACHOWSKI

Marty Machowski is an elder at [Covenant Fellowship Church](#) (Glen Mills, PA) and is chairman of the Sovereign Grace Polity Committee.