

Teaching Our Children to Listen to the Lord's Word

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Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears. (I Samuel 3:9)

The Lord Himself is the Master Teacher. He works to lead all people to heaven. He leads from within to awaken the love of what is good and true in the human mind. All this He does in secret through the inner urgings of the soul. And for our delight and fulfillment, the Lord extends the privilege of cooperating with Him in the education of our children. And if we would learn to teach our children successfully, we must try to do it from Him—in the light of His truth and the warmth of His love.

Our cooperation with the Lord centers in bringing our children into direct contact with His Holy Word (Bible), which contains the light that is to become the “life of man.” By prayers and songs, we first initiate our children into the worship of the Lord. We tend to wait until children can respond before introducing them to things of religion, but the Heavenly Doctrines teach us that the earlier the better! “Celestial things of love...are insinuated into man chiefly in his state of infancy up to childhood, and in fact without knowledges; for they flow in from the Lord, and affect him, before the man knows what love is and what affection is” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1450).

By saying the Lord's Prayer at the bedside of their newborn and singing songs, especially from the Word, parents cooperate with the Lord. They are providing a basis for the presence of celestial angels who communicate inmost delights to their infants. These delights of love to the Lord and to the neighbor—remain with children to be the foundation for a love of what is true and good in later life—and into eternity.

As children mature they are called back to the Word by delight—delight in a story told dramatically and with an awareness of the visual as well as the words. We cannot love an invisible God, and children cannot delight in a story that cannot be easily pictured in their imaginations. We know that children are in a sensual state; we can meet their needs by bringing the stories of the Word alive to their senses—to be heard and seen, felt and lived, and above all, delighted in!

In seeking to give the Word to our children we need to emphasize two “R's”—Reverence and Repetition. Reverence should stem from what the Writings call “Holy Fear.” “All worship of God must begin with Holy Fear, which is the thought that God will reward the good and punish the evil. Little children must believe this because they do not yet understand what (the permission of evil is)...And when (little children) begin by not daring through fear to do what is evil, there is gradually insinuated love together with good, and they begin to know and perceive that nothing but what is good is from the Lord, and that evil is from themselves, and at last that all evil is from hell” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6071:30). For young children Holy Fear or reverence can take the form of concern that calling attention to themselves might disturb the worship of others. Children need to be taught a self-control, which promotes the uses of family and public worship. (But remember, this takes time.)

Repetition is essential to all learning. Listening to stories from the Word over and over so that they become familiar and loved is of the utmost importance for children. A familiar story, like a familiar song, evokes an affectional response and brings a special delight to the growing mind. The core of the Old Testament is the Ten Commandments, which should be gone over on a regular basis. So should the Lord's Prayer, which can be ever new, ever refreshing in its insights and spheres. Repeating one recitation several times helps impress it indelibly on children's minds, and of course, special festival recitations can be practiced so they can be said by heart. This can bring the deepest delight. Even very young children can learn simple sentences from the Word such as those said at mealtimes as blessings or ones like "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears," or "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

A careful study of the Word in sequence introduces children's minds to all the issues of life—of right and wrong, of obedience and disobedience, of honesty and dishonesty, of marriage and adultery. All human relations are dealt with in the Word so that a systematic review introduces children to life and to eternal life!

Feelings of mutual delight between parents and children are built on the affections from the early tellings and can be infilled with more mature knowledge and applications to life. For example, in our story this month, the Lord tells Samuel about the evil things Eli's sons are doing and how they will be destroyed. Children at this age need only to know that the Lord talks to Samuel, much as He can talk to them. Later, when they get older, more details can be added to this knowledge about how we respond to the Lord and what the story means on other levels. We can prepare our children for many of the difficulties of growing up by means of stories from the Word. A fundamental grasp of the basic stories of the Old and New Testaments reaches into all knowledge and experience and prepares the mind to understand the Lord, mankind, and ourselves.

Cooperation with the Lord means, then, leading our children to delight in His Word. The Word lives and imparts life to all who learn to approach it with reverence.

"The Word is living and gives life, because in it, in the supreme sense, the Lord is treated of, and in the inmost sense His kingdom...so that it is life itself that is in the Word, and that inflows into the minds of those who read the Word with reverence (*Arcana Coelestia* 3424). See also *In His Light*, chapters 1 and 2.