

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

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## Weaving the Strands of Faith by Jean Buell

If I were a mother bird, I'm not sure I would want my babies to leave the nest. Some mother birds call their babies out shortly after they are born. They follow her calls and often fall as much as six feet to the ground. Some people call this instinct, but I call it faith.

Fortunately or unfortunately, human life is more complicated than a leap of faith. And fortunately, faith itself can be much more gratifying.

My parents didn't call me out of the nest when I was young, but they did call me to faith while I was still at home. We prayed at bedtime and mealtime, worshiped on weekends, and celebrated the holidays. These occurrences may seem too ordinary to mention, but they do prove a point—our nest was woven strong with strands of faith. A context of faith existed for everything that happened.

When I was in fifth grade, my grandpa died after a short fight with an illness. The night I found out, I went to bed and cried. I didn't understand why God would let him die when I had prayed so hard for his recovery. Strong and tender, my dad consoled me. He reminded me to pray with the words "*Thy will be done.*" In that intimate moment, my dad taught me to trust God the same way he did. That was a turning point in my faith; it started moving from rote to real. I was growing.

Young people grow up just as do young birds. If I were a mother bird, I'd prefer to be of a less dramatic

species—a species that lets its babies stay in the nest while they grow. They can go in and out, exercising their wings as they walk along the tree branches, but they don't actually leave until they are ready to fly.

Now I have grown up, flown from my parents' nest, and have a nest of my own. Like my parents, I haven't called my children out, but I am calling them to faith while they are still at home. We pray at bedtime and mealtime, worship on weekends, and celebrate the holidays. A context of faith exists for everything that happens.

Recently, my dad died after a short fight with an illness. Coincidentally, my older son was in fifth grade just like I was when my grandpa died. Tearfully, we prayed hard together for my dad's recovery. After each prayer I added the words, "*We trust you, God. Thy will be done.*" I'm trying to teach my children the same way my dad taught me. I want them to trust God—not just when they grow up and leave the nest, but each time they "exercise their wings" while they are growing up.

I believe that trust in God is the most important strand of faith. It makes faith what it is supposed to be; it guides our decisions and actions, it helps us accept what we can't control or explain, and it gives us

hope. Without trust we would have no relationship with God. All the doctrines and traditions that we could ever learn would be nothing but mere words and gestures.

Life is indeed complicated, and children have a lot to learn before they leave the nest. They learn what they live, and they learn from the people they live with. What strands are you weaving into your nest? When your children leave, do you want to watch them fall or help them fly? It's your call.

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# Parenting for Faith Growth

by Leif Kehrwald

Years ago, when he was five years old, our younger son announced that he had heard God speak to him. My wife, Rene, responded by listing several ways that God frequently “speaks” to people: through another’s good deed, in a beautiful sunset, in a thought we have while praying, at Sunday Mass. But Luke responded, “No, Mom, God used a voice and spoke to me!”

Would you believe me if I said a simple but challenging seven-step process will ensure your child will grow up as a believer? Don’t. While certain activities like prayer, ritual, and service to others really do make a difference, raising a spiritual family takes more effort than following a certain set of prescribed steps.

Raising a spiritual family is more of an art. Creating the right atmosphere for a child or teen to catch a glimpse of God’s activity and respond to it is important. This is tricky, of course, because not only is the right atmosphere different for every child in every family, but the right atmosphere is different for every occasion as well.

I recently had a rather intimate conversation with my older son as he took the risk of telling me about his feelings for a girl: “I’ve never felt this way before, Dad. She’s really special.” That worries me a bit, but I’m thrilled he confided in me. Then I stopped and reflected . . . atmosphere again. I’ve been working hard for weeks to be really present to him, sometimes even in his face. I guess the pay-off is no accident after all.

For faith to be alive and real, it must connect with life’s experiences. We must take advantage of the teachable moments that occur each day, whether they occur in the bathtub, at the dinner table, or in front of the television. When we recognize God’s activity in our children and teens, we then try to create an atmosphere that lets us point it out to them. An artist has a good eye and a strong intuitive sense

of what lies beneath the surface of the canvas. Like artists, we can reveal the beauty of God’s love that often lies just beneath the surface of our children.

Unless we’re aware of God’s presence in our own lives, though, we’ll never see it in theirs. When we’re in touch with our own faith, our actions will come across with conviction because they are a deep, rich, natural part of our lives. But beware. As parents our job is not to form and shape children into the “image and likeness” of ourselves; rather, we must help them respond to what God calls them to be. As they grow and mature, they will surely express their spirituality differently than we do. Our challenge is to rejoice in the differences and to seek ways to learn and grow from them.

Are we doing enough to help our children develop a personal relationship with God? Everyone experiences God in his or her own way, but as parents we can create an atmosphere in which our children can discover and respond to God’s activity. But we must be careful not to force discovery and response because our attempts will probably be rejected (if not now, perhaps later). Our children must be free to discover God in their own ways.

A key ingredient to that freedom is the affirmation we can offer when they tell us about their experiences.

In response to my son Luke’s claim of hearing God’s voice, Rene had the wisdom to ask what God said. “God told me he loves me and everyone in our family,” he said, and then he wandered off. It was so matter-of-fact for him. Who were we to argue? Luke is fourteen now and seems to listen to different voices . . . through his headphones. But he’s still a believer.

## Worth Quoting

In her book *Gently Lead: How to Teach Your Children About God While Finding Out for Yourself* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), Polly Berrien Berends offers this poignant little story:

CHILD: Mom, how did you get to know so much about God?

MOTHER: I don’t know much. But I’ve been around for a while and been to schools and had wonderful teachers. There were teachers from the past, too—Moses and Isaiah and Jesus and Buddha. But besides all those, I have two private Zen masters who are always teaching me and making my learning into real understanding and love. I am very grateful for these two private Zen masters.

CHILDREN: Tell us! Who are they? What are their names? You never told us about them!

MOTHER: Their names are Jan and Andy. It is you who are my Zen masters.

CHILDREN (laughing): Oh, Mom! We teach you? You’re joking.

MOTHER: No, I am not kidding. You are my two best Zen masters.

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