

CHILD DEDICATION

Though you can't give your child a "moral vaccine" to ensure freedom from debilitating spiritual diseases, you can give your child "daily doses of spiritual vitamins" as you expose them to the Living God, his trustworthy Word and the life-giving Holy Spirit. Most life-long healthy habits are learned at home. See your child as an "apprentice in the ways of Jesus", one who will someday decide whether or not to continue in their journey as a student of God. So, be a role model for what you want to develop in your child. Prayerfully saturate your child in God's Word and Spirit. Model a commitment to serving the church community. And live a life dedicated to following Jesus in the power of the Spirit. As your child grows and daily ingests these "spiritual vitamins" he or she will be better prepared to hear the gospel and follow Jesus as an adult.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

CHILD DEDICATION: A COMMITMENT TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S PURPOSES.

Being a friend of God is a life-long adventure. And God sovereignly lays a solid foundation for the relationship he longs to have with your child. He does this even *before* a child is born (Ephesians 1:4-6). King David was in awe of the loving hand of the Father seen in the development of every person:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth. (Psalm 139:13-16)

God's ultimate goal is to continue to develop and shape your child into the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29). In the Child Dedication Service, parents and the church community— together—make a personal and public commitment to cooperate with God's loving purposes to raise the child according to God's biblical design.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT FOR DEDICATING CHILDREN?

We dedicate children following the example of godly parents in the Bible who publicly dedicated their children to God because he had entrusted them to their care. Hannah dedicated Samuel with these words:

"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." (1 Sam. 1:27-28)

Mary and Joseph dedicated baby Jesus:

"And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." (Lk. 2:40)

May this blessing be true of *your* child too! Jesus especially loved children and taught that we were to depend upon God the way a child depends upon parents: People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEDICATION AND BAPTISM?

We all know that you can't "decide" when or if your child will enter a marriage relationship. The decision to marry (and whom to marry) will be his or her own. Furthermore, we can't guarantee a happy marriage.

Likewise, you can't "decide" your child's relationship with God. Each person must make their own decision to begin a relationship with Jesus, to follow him, and allow the Spirit to lead every area of their life. Baptism does not initiate a relationship with God. It shows, in your obedience to be baptized, that you already *have* one. It does not make you a follower of Jesus. It shows you already *are* one. Baptism does not save you. Your faith in Jesus saves you (Ephesians 2:9). So, we do not baptize people until they are old enough to know and understand that their sin has separated them from a saving relationship with God. When a person is old enough to see they are responsible for their sin before God and understand and trust the remedy that Jesus' death and resurrection provides, and they are eager to follow him, then they are ready to be baptized.

Baptism, then, differs from child dedication because it is an outward, public expression of an inward working of God's life-giving grace. Child dedication differs. It is a public commitment by the parents and the church community to train the child according to the pattern God has designed for that particular child in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Though you can't guarantee a happy marriage relationship for your child, you can model what a healthy relationship looks like. Likewise, your positive example of following Jesus can lay a foundation for your child and help them make a wise decision to follow Jesus when that day comes. The Child Dedication Service is a commitment by the parent and the church community to model a healthy spiritual relationship with God. When the child is old enough—by God's grace—they too will make their own decision to follow Jesus, just as you have.

WHAT HAPPENS AT A CHILD DEDICATION SERVICE?

This is done by public dedication during a worship service. In the worship service, the family who is dedicating their child(ren) is invited to come to the front of the church and each parent and child is introduced. Then the parents and those representing the church community (pastors, prayer ministry team, and often other friends of the family) pray for the child *and* the parents. The spiritual significance of this prayer of dedication includes:

Together, the parents and church community recognize that God gives the gift of children to parents (Psalm 127:3).

The parents dedicate themselves to raise their child in a Jesus-centered environment and train and educate them to follow, love and serve God (Deuteronomy 6:5-7; Ephesians 6:4).

The church community dedicates itself to help the family train and instruct the child and to lay a foundation of learning about God.

The Holy Spirit blesses both the child and the parents and answers the prayers of the church community to influence the child now—and for the rest the child's life!

