

Teaching Children to Have Faith in God

*The faith of little children can warm the sternest heart.
But where, as children grow up, does that faith go? Don't fail,
as parents, to nurture your children's faith in God!*

By Selmer Hegvold

Little Denice lay bundled in blankets, propped up in a corner of the couch in the living room. Her face was flushed and hot to the touch and her eyes were faded with fever. She had been sick through the long hours of the night.

I sat on the couch's edge alongside her and told her that, as one of God's ministers, I had come to anoint and pray for her. She nodded her head in appreciation. She readily explained, "I hurt awful all over!" Yet, she knew God loved her and did not want her to hurt and that He could and *would* make her well!

Saying a simple prayer she could understand, I anointed her fevered forehead with olive oil. I assured her that God had promised to take away her sickness and pain and that very soon she would be up and playing about the house. Snuggled in her warm blankets, she quietly looked at me and nodded weakly. She understood and believed with all her 5-year-old mind and heart.

I chatted a few minutes with her mother at the door, but before I could leave, we heard a commotion in the living room we had just left. We rushed in. There on the floor in her pajamas was little Denice, now surrounded with her toys and playing happily. To her mother's startled exclamation, Denice smilingly stated:

"God made me well again! I don't hurt anymore. He [pointing to me] said I could get up and play when God made me so I don't hurt." Her brick-hot fever was entirely gone! God had performed His grand miracle of healing just as Denice knew He

would. She was already busy with her activities for the day. God had rewarded her childlike faith.

As a small child, Denice had an unshakable faith in God. Sadly, as she matured, her faith weakened. She became like so many other children whose faith dwindles and sometimes disappears between the time they are preschoolers and the time they become young adults.

What causes this tragedy in our youngsters? Can we find and correct the problem before their young attitudes are shaken or damaged? What kind of examples are we, as parents, setting for them? How can we expand our children's faith in God and keep that faith growing?

"Little ones which believe"

Notice what Christ revealed about the nature of those who would enter the Kingdom of God: "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and *become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:1-6).

Christ delighted in the trustfulness of little children. We all need this childlike faith, the faith that reveals the *give* principle of God's own nature! Faith is a gift from God — protect and nourish it when you see it displayed in your children, the "heritage of the Lord" (Ps. 127:3).

Unfortunately, this world goes to the opposite extreme, destroying innocent trust and thus earning Christ's condemnation for offending "these little ones." Children today are the victims of a society that frowns on discipline. Parents are taught to give children free rein during their formative years.

As Satan pumps his evil nature into children and it becomes their nature — human nature — any childlike faith is turned into discouragement, selfishness and rebellion against authority. Permissiveness is reaping a bitter harvest of rebels running amok and plaguing us.

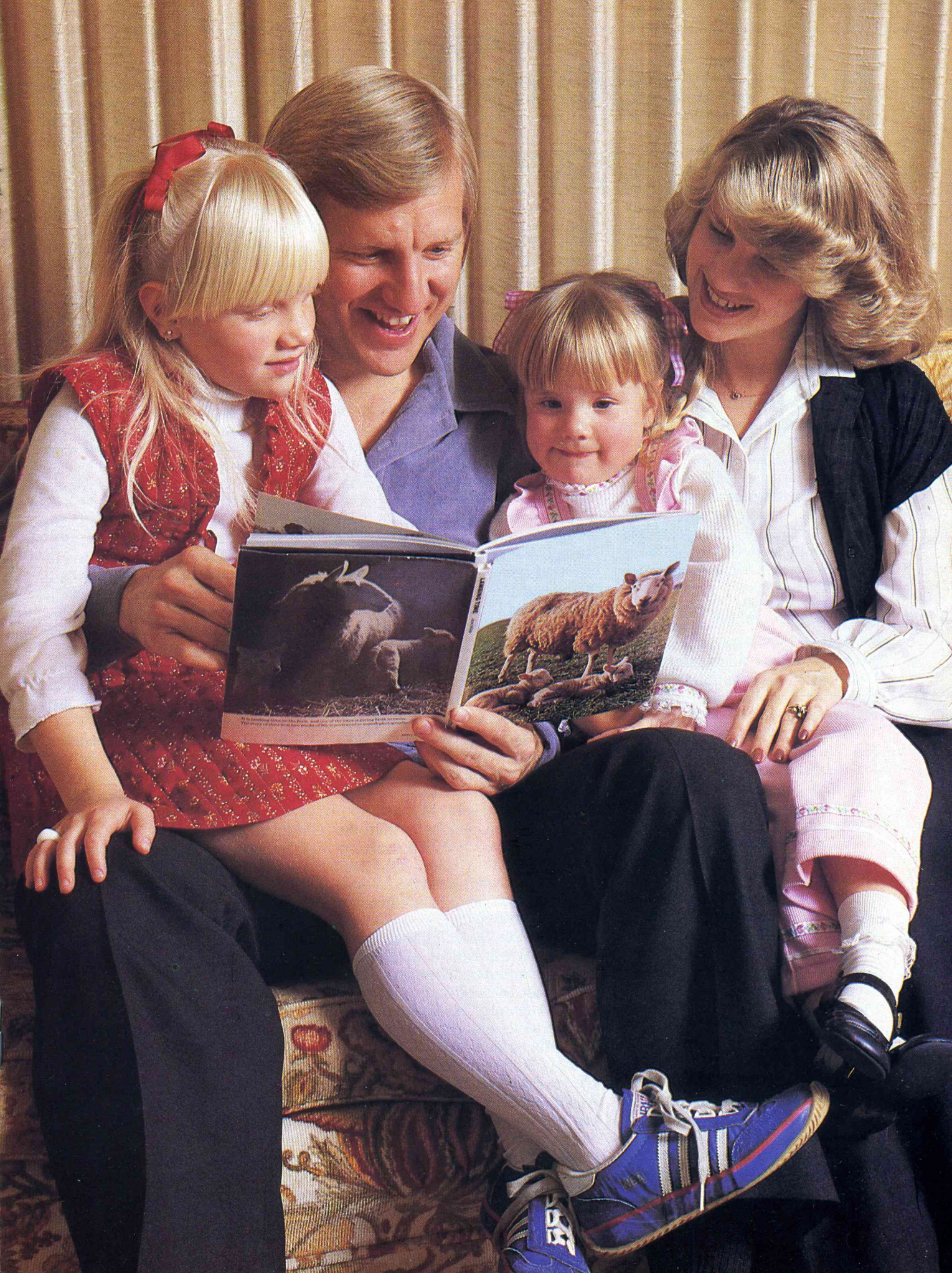
Parental responsibility

Parenthood is a great responsibility. The duties involved include teaching your children, and teaching a child to have faith in God must begin at the cradle and continue throughout the child's developing years.

God required Abram to prove himself to be a worthy trainer of men for a full 100 years before He gave him his own son, Isaac, through his wife Sarai. And Abram qualified by proving to God that he could love, nourish and train a son of his own.

Abram was a wealthy merchant who dealt with all who traversed the Palestinian trade routes. He pos-

Photo by Warren Watson



sessed vast flocks and had the status of a king everywhere he went. He had many servants in his household — and he carefully tutored every one of them to believe as he believed and to worship as he worshiped. Abram's household, which must have numbered well over a thousand, was courageous and loyal to him (Gen. 14:14-16). Abram set the example of righteous living for everyone. He taught his entire household well, and they followed his leadership.

And so it was through Abram and his wife Sarai that God began to develop a people to serve Him. God knew that Abram would train his own son just as he had trained his entire household, and so, in Abram's hundredth year, Isaac was born to him.

No words of reproof are recorded in the Bible about his son. God became known throughout the Bible as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And just as Abraham taught his son faith in God, you can build faith in your children from which they will never depart.

Explaining the angels

Teaching children about angels is a powerful way to build their faith in God. Children are enthralled with the concept of these spiritual helpers God created.

Explain God's purpose for angels. Tell your children how important angels are to God's vast creation and to them personally.

Angels serve as God's messengers. Read to your children about Moses' startling encounter with an angel of God within the burning bush. Young minds relate marvelously to accounts such as this. You must successfully vie with television and its fascinating adventures, or TV's fictional spectacles will hold the minds of your youths. The incredible Bible stories are real! They can serve as springboards to explaining the awesome future God has in store for all who will love and obey Him.

Describe how the angels protect God's people from harm. Apparently angels play a special role in watching over children: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the

face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

God speeds His holy angels to aid those who worship Him. Impress upon your child that nothing is more powerful than God, and relate the stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Explain that the fourth individual in the blazing, fiery furnace along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego was a powerful angel of the living God!

The angel, more powerful than the flames, shielded the three men so thoroughly that not a hair on their bodies was singed. The great world ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, stood aghast and dumbfounded at this great attestation of God's unlimited power. He exclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him" (Dan. 3:28).

The enemies of King Darius were thrown to hungry lions. But even strong, famished lions are no match for God's angels. Daniel, God's servant, had his faith tested when he was shut up in a den of several such starving lions. He trusted God to deliver him and God responded.

Next morning, when Darius rushed to the den to see how Daniel fared, "he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel . . . O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

"Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Dan. 6:20-22).

Search the Bible for similar accounts that will build a strong basis for faith in your child. Begin as soon as your son or daughter wants you to read to him or her. As he develops his reading skills, he will want to read these stories for himself.

If you start with these biblical stories and progress in time to deeper topics, your child will fill his mind with the very real adventures of the Bible and not some make-believe television program. There is no better way to build your child's faith in God.

When your children come to you with problems, discuss them. Tell them to pray to God about them and promise that your prayers will also be going up along with theirs for Him to grant them the right results. Frequently invite them to join in your private prayers to God. The knowledge that you pray often and are not embarrassed to be discovered in prayer helps remove inhibitions they might have about prayer.

When results come, make them aware that the answers to their prayers have arrived. This is the strongest tool to increase faith that can come your way. If the answers come in unexpected ways, be alert to this and clarify those answers. Help them to see **God answers all prayers, but sometimes He answers in ways not immediately evident.**

Positive rewards of faith

God has blessed His Church today with many children. What this desperately sick and chaotic world around us needs is the loving, strong and well-trained generation of young people that is at this moment growing up under your tutelage. Their wisdom and foresight in the decades to come, in the wonderful world tomorrow, will lead the entire world back to the worship of its great and wonderful God.

Because you are today a member of God's Church, engaged in announcing to the world the good news of the coming of God's Kingdom to put down Satan's evil devices, your children are very special to God. As I Corinthians 7 shows, your children are totally unlike their peers in the unconverted world about them. They are set apart in a different category. They are not cut off from God! If you stimulate continued growth in faith in them until they come to physical, mental and emotional maturity, then God may call them to His Work.

And what a thrill it is to see conversion — the miracle of a totally changed attitude — begin to take place in your children! You will know that God has gained these dedicated servants to fill great needs in His important Work for this age. This joy will be your reward for faith, and for a job well done in the sight of Christ and our Father in heaven. □