

Religion and Kids

A comment to me in a Facebook group, “I hope your child’s participation in religious stuff is voluntary.” Indeed, I’m happy to report that it is. I’d be a big fat hypocrite if it wasn’t. This brings me to share a few thoughts on the subject.

As a Latter-day Saint, I believe the following scriptures are the word of God:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” – Proverbs 22:6

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” – Ephesians 6:5

“But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.” – D&C 93:40

“Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things (the Plan of Salvation) freely unto your children...” – Moses 6:58

(Here’s the full list of scripture references on the raising of children in Latter-day Saint canon.)

I don’t see anything here commanding us to use force and coercion in order to raise our kids in the Church. On the contrary, D&C 121:41-42 gives us the strategy to use, “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.”

I believe the best way to teach your kids to do something is to be an example. “Do as I do” as the saying goes. There’s no need for force and coercion. I certainly don’t want to take my kids to church kicking and screaming. That’s counter-productive for obvious reasons, and will teach them to resent it.

Latter-day Saint children are baptized at 8 years of age. Again, there’s no reason to force this onto them. If they don’t want to be baptized, leave it alone. It would be immoral and unethical to force them into membership of the Church. Christ never taught that. He didn’t

convert by the sword. To do so would be contrary to the teachings of Christ, as per D&C 121:41-42 quoted above.

Same goes for missionary service. If they have a testimony, they'll want to serve. If not, there's no point in going. A mission isn't to find their convictions, it's to share them. General Authorities have been clear on this. I didn't serve a mission, and my conviction was self-directed. I was taken to church as a child, and baptized at 8. I was cajoled into going until I was around 12, and then my family stopped going all together. I re-discovered the Church when I was 19, and decided to marry my wife instead of serving a mission.

My children's testimonies will be their own. I won't force religion onto them, and I won't try to convert them by the sword. I'll share my convictions in peaceful and voluntary ways, and hope they "choose the right".

(cross-posted on my Faith blog)

Skyler.