

Helping Our Children Overcome Their Fears

BY KIM STILWELL



Most children struggle with fear from time to time, but some can become paralyzed by them. I had a couple of children like that. It was a long road, but I am happy to say that, while they still struggle occasionally with fear and worry, those things no longer control them. They now do things that scare me, such as going to Tennessee to help tornado victims during the height of Covid, rappelling down mountains, traveling to other countries, just to name a few. More importantly, they stand for Christ in a world where that is becoming harder to do.

World events can be frightening for adults. How much more so for our children! What can we, as parents, do to help our children during these times? As much as I wish I could, I can't give you a magic formula. There isn't one. However, I will share some things that were helpful to Jeff and me when we were raising our children.

From the time our children were little, God's sovereignty has been a natural part of our conversation. We often talked about how our loving Heavenly Father is ultimately in control of everything. We told them that, as much as Daddy and Mommy love them, God loves them even more. When they were really little, it was hard for them to grasp this concept, and some of our kids struggled with this in their teens as well. But eventually, they all took God's sovereignty to heart.

While you don't need to keep your children in denial about world events and difficult situations (such as problems with extended family, difficult church situations, etc), these difficulties should not be dwelt on constantly in front of them. Depending on their age and maturity, it is probably fine to let them know some or all of what is going on. We should let them process it and talk about it. However, it does your child a great disservice to constantly have these things be the topic of every dinnertime conversation. It helps your children greatly with their fears and insecurities if most of the family conversations are about pleasant or practical topics.

When my children were afraid, it often helped if they had a spe-

cific verse or song to recite or sing either out loud or in their minds. There are wonderful verses on fear, many of them in Psalms, and they can be found with a Google search or concordance. But one verse that I recited often to my children is Psalm 56:3, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." A song that I sang to them from the time they were very young was Ron Hamilton's "How Can I Fear." It can be found on YouTube.

Pray with and for your children. When your child is afraid, the first go-to response should be to pray with them and then encourage them to pray on their own. We will not always be with them, so the best thing we can do for them is to teach them to take their fears straight to God even when Mom and Dad aren't around. One of my children wrote out a prayer for a specific worry and kept it with her at all times to pull out when needed. And no matter what their age,

praying for your children on a daily basis, whether it be about fear or anything else in life, is the single best thing you can do for them.

No matter how ridiculous an anxiety may seem to an adult, it is very real to the child. Listen to them, talk to them, pray with them, and point them to Christ. But do not ever belittle or ridicule them. That is one of the fastest ways to lose your

child's trust. If children are ridiculed for their "little" concerns when they are small, they will not share their big concerns when they are teenagers or young adults.

Ultimately, the goal is to equip your children to overcome their fears without you. I am certainly not saying you shouldn't be there for your child when they are afraid. You should. But you will not always be in their life, and their ultimate source of security needs to come from God. So, yes, be their safety net. Listen to them. Walk them through their fears. Pray with them. But always point them back to Christ, the only One who can give them true peace.

Remind your child of former victories over fear. ("Remember when you were afraid of caterpillars, and now you let them crawl right up your arm?") Knowing they have conquered situations that made

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