



Outgrowing the Christian Bubble

Should I let my 12-year-old watch this R-rated movie?"
"What are some Christian family-friendly songs appropriate for my elementary-aged children?"

"Can my 8-year-old read Harry Potter?" (YES!)

These sorts of questions plague many Christian parents. At the root of these practical daily decisions is the desire to frame the way our children interact with society at large. On one hand, we want to protect our children by censoring their exposure to the often-brutal realities of our world. On the other, many of us grew up in Christian bubbles, restricted to cheesy Christian music titles and sanitized book selections. We resolved to expose our children to the beauty in art and literature and yes, even the latest Hollywood blockbuster.

What is the sentiment behind the Christian Bubble Makers? Raising children in a sheltered environment enables them to put down strong roots in the Christian tradition. They develop a strong foundation in their belief system so that once in the world, they won't be tousel by the prevailing cultural winds. They'll be able to defend their faith in any situation.

I have heard it described like this: if we can teach them what the "real" God looks like, they'll be able to spot the counterfeits.

The problem is that this setup is inherently defensive. It postures the Christian community as those on the inside venturing out. Before 'the littles' are mature enough to handle the outside world, the bubble is a necessary protective mechanism. Insiders = good, outsiders = bad. Children thrive on structure and categorize by nature. They easily internalize this paradigm from a young age and their life experiences become black and white value judgments.

But unless the child remains in a commune, they inevitably experience a world of diverse values and expressions of life. The stress of categorizing good vs. bad creates a faith crisis that leads either to a rejection of their childhood faith OR a rigid persistence that only the God inside the bubble is real. So God either doesn't exist, or is a very small—the fenced-in God who needs defending at all costs.

Raising children un-fundamentalist means

teaching kids not who God is, but where to find God. Not what God is, but how to spot God. Young children don't need a painstaking theology that delineates each character trait of God. They need permission to discover God for themselves. Parents are much better postured as students of our children, because their delight and wonder in our world have much to teach us about where God is alive and present.

Pay attention to what breathes life into their souls, what makes their eyes twinkle and their laughter infectious. Watch how they give generously, lavishing hugs and kisses. See through their eyes the attention to details we have taken for granted—tiny ants and the big, blue sky.

Show them God's love by loving them, loving others, and pointing out acts of goodness, kindness and justice in this world. Together with them, soak in the beauty of breath-stealing art, jaw-dropping talent, and heart-warming generosity. Then wonder together, "did we just see a glimpse of God?"

Read them stories. Bible stories certainly, but also

fairy tales of dragon warriors and princesses. Tell them stories of our ancestors, of children in Afghanistan and Iceland, of our neighbors down the road. Let them spot the

heroes and the villains and ask them where they see God moving in hearts, in love, in power.

When it comes to God, we are not their teachers, we are co-spectators of God's glory. We are not sending them out armed with a defense of God against the world, but filled with an anticipation of how they can experience God in their world.

Parents are often saddled with anxiety—we want to make sure we teach our children all they need to know within the short eighteen years we have them at home. But when it comes to our faith, we can breathe easy, because our God is not limited to eighteen years of instruction. We walk with our children at the very beginning of their journey, and then watch them dip their toes into how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God.

The question we need to ask when they leave home is not, have you learned everything there is to know about God? But rather, "Are you ready to get started?" □

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