The Four Difference Makers

Ben Freudenburg, youth minister and author of *The Family Friendly Church*, was a disturbed by what he saw among the youth in his own congregation. He began to research statistics about young people and their involvement in risky behaviors. Ben wrestled with the fact that there was virtually no difference in the statistics of “churched” kids versus “unchurched” kids in the use of drugs, alcohol and sex

His wrestling and research led him to a discovery. Going to church alone will not necessarily make the crucial difference. There are four simple family habits that DO make the difference in helping children of all ages, through early childhood through the teen years, keep high standards of behavior and reinforce their spirituality. They are based on such common sense they will make you smile. They are so simple you will breathe a sigh of relief.

The four **“difference makers”** are:

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| http://www.tsl.org.php5-15.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/family/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/no12.jpg | ***Talking about God and your faith with your mother.***  |
| http://www.tsl.org.php5-15.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/family/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/no22.jpg | ***Talking about God and your faith with your father.***  |
| http://www.tsl.org.php5-15.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/family/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/no32.jpg | ***Praying together as a family each day.***  |
| http://www.tsl.org.php5-15.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/family/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/no42.jpg | ***Doing service projects together as a family to help those in need.***  |

It makes profound sense that these factors matter so deeply. We as parents are the single most powerful influence on our children’s lives. Freudenburg reminds us that “the family is the God-ordained institution for faith building in children and youth and for the passing of faith from one generation to the next.”

Freudenburg says, “Parents are the primary Christian educators in the church. “We cannot think that Sunday school teachers and youth group leaders will do the job for us that we as parents must do. Giving our children opportunity to talk with us about God and their faith is easy when we make it a priority. We can both initiate conversations and respond when our children want and need to talk to us. Discussions about God can become a regular, spontaneous part of life. It is through conversation and through our actions we demonstrate to our children that we love God and are grateful for his presence in our daily lives.

**Talking about God and your faith with your mother**

**Talking about God and your faith with your father**

* When it comes to God, model your spiritual beliefs with your children.
* At dinner time or when you have family time, review with gratitude the events of the day and how they are a part of God’s plan for us. Tell your family about how much you love God and are grateful for graces and blessings.
* As you are saying good night to your child or at other quiet times, talk about what God means to you and invite your child to share his ideas and experiences.
* Plan special times when each parent has time alone with each child in your family. Use these times to talk about how life is going for them, what they think about God and how they can be more in tune with God. 
* Use “teachable moments,” those moments when you can use events to make a point or open an age-appropriate discussion.
	+ When you are reading a story or watching a movie, discuss the moral of the story.
	+ You hear about someone ill or injured, offer a prayer.
	+ Your child tells you about his friend telling a lie, you talk about honor and the standard of living by God’s laws.
	+ When your child tells you about something troubling him.
	+ When you see your child is struggling with peer pressure, school pressure or experiencing difficulties with relationships
* Make sure your child knows you are available to talk, no matter what is going on in his world.
* Initiate conversations even when your child may seem like he or she does not want to talk!

**Praying together as a family each day**

* We have probably all heard the statement: “The family that prays together stays together.” It is true. The bond of common worship of God is a powerful one.
* Grace at mealtimes is simple and provides a regular opportunity to pray together.
* Bedtime prayer is a wonderful opportunity for prayer and bonding with God and your child.
* If your children are old enough to watch the news with you or read the news, you can say spontaneous prayers with them that pertain to the news
* Saying prayers at bedtime can easily become a family ritual. Many families pray on their knees at their child’s bedside and offer prayers for one another and whatever else is in their heart.
* Adjust your prayer rituals to the age of your children.
* Implement family night once a week that includes time for discussions and planning, games and the prayers of your choice.

**Doing service projects together as a family to help others in need**

* Service can be as simple as cheerfully doing chores in your own home and helping one another with projects.
* Helping out a grandparent, other neighborhood elder can be easy to arrange and very satisfying.
* Refer to **“Service Project Manual”** for some great suggestions for family service projects on this downloadable resource: <http://tsl.org/family/community/>

Our families mean everything to us and these may be difficult times for our children and teens to navigate through. These four difference makers are simple yet significant. They are easy to implement in your own creative manner along the pathway.