

The Best Gifts

Introduction. The top gifts for Christmas 2020, including the Sony PS5 and the Microsoft Xbox Series X, are the Zing Air Go Go Bird, Spotty the Dalmatian Squeakee Balloon Dog, and Baby Yoda.

It is the season for gift-giving, and with it the yearly struggle to find, procure, and provide the “perfect” present for your child(ren). Parents are well-meaning; they intend to give good gifts (Matthew 7:9-10). In addition to the more “traditional” gifts that you will give later this week, here are five more spiritually useful ideas.

I. Time And Affection

- A. “If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them and half as much money on them” (Abigail Van Buren).
- B. “Hannah did not go up” in 1 Samuel 1:20-23. Children need the presence of their parents to rear them. It doesn’t take a “village” to raise children, but it does take a mommy and daddy!
- C. Time slips away, so are you giving your time to your children?
 - 1. Are we always too busy for our children? Do we give them the personal interest they deserve? Do we give them all the gifts they ask for — but give grudgingly the most precious gift — our personal association?
 - 2. They need to be taught how to deal with others, how to hit and throw a baseball and softball, etc. Our children need us, not the possessions we can give them (Proverbs 3:13-14; Matthew 16:26; Luke 12:7; 1 Timothy 6:6-9).
- D. Our children’s emotional and spiritual needs cannot be served and nurtured by material possessions.

II. Guidance And Discipline

- A. Since faith cannot be endowed — at least not by us — the next best thing is to provide what enables it. We want our children to mature into faithful young men and women, so why not give them what develops faith — the knowledge and understanding of the Bible?
 - 1. Does your child have a good Bible that is age-appropriate and that they can read and understand? Are you investing the effort and time necessary to help them do so (Ephesians 6:4)?
 - 2. You can’t “give” them faith, nor can you leave them yours as an inheritance. But you can provide the means and motivation necessary to help them develop the personal faith necessary to be pleasing to God and saved eternally (Deuteronomy 11:18-21; Proverbs 4:3-4; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6). What’s in their little hearts is so special.
 - 3. Spend at least some of the money that you would have spent on disposable toys and gadgets (especially those that wear away at faith) for your children and invest in their spiritual growth and maturity in, of, and through faith.
- B. Children also need parents who have the strength to exercise consistent discipline, regardless of the cost.
 - 1. An unknown author remarked, “Some families can trace their ancestors back 300 years, but can’t tell you where their children were last night.” It’s one

thing when they conceal it from you, and another when you don't care enough to know it!

2. Parents must have the courage, will, and wisdom to correct their children (Proverbs 13:24; 29:15, 17; cp. 1 Samuel 3:13).
- C. "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children" (The Duke of Windsor, *Look*, March 5, 1957).

III. Priority And Focus

- A. Children learn and practice what they live and experience in the family.
 1. Even children that are consistently taken to Bible class at the local congregation spend roughly 1.5 hours a week studying and learning about God and spiritual subjects.
 2. That means 166.5 hours per week are spent elsewhere, primarily in the home. An hour and a half a week cannot overcome an unrighteous or unprioritized life at home. Did you realize that's less than 1% of their total time in the week? If you add worship, it's only 2.4% of your time!
 3. We're meeting again on Wednesday evenings for Bible study. Will your children remember the lessons and the teachers who instructed them in living for Jesus or will they be happy they got in bed an hour earlier?
- B. The strong pull of immoral living can radically change a child's life. And these are some of the hardest temptations for many to overcome. Parents can set the example and show them how to say no (Ephesians 5:3-7; cp. Job 1:5).
- C. A lot of interests in life are not wrong, but they do reveal what we are passionate about. Is it sports? Is it academics? Does it help or hinder faithfulness to God?
 1. Children should see that Christ is first with us (Matthew 6:33), and that we reflect the principles of kingdom living (Matthew 5:3-11).
 2. Will they see parents with the heart of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego or Daniel (Daniel 3:16-18; 6:10)?
 3. Educate them in saintly living, not just academics (Philippians 4:8-9). Let them see parents who actively and faithfully participate in spiritual work (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19). This will pay such good dividends!
- D. Children need strong, disciplined, spiritually mature parents to serve as models and to surround them with nurturing love. "You're not a good parent, if at some point you are not an embarrassment to your children" (Malcolm Forbes, Sr.).

IV. Compliments And Praise

- A. It discourages children when all they hear is negativity (Colossians 3:21).
 1. Children can become "discouraged" by being unnecessarily provoked, nagged, or belittled, or by being ignored and neglected.
 2. If we spend more time telling them what they do wrong, they will lose respect and a willingness to listen to us (Proverbs 18:19; cp. 16:32).
- B. Children need to be reinforced with praise, trust, attention, and affection. Treat them like you believe Psalm 127:3-5.

V. Order And Stability

- A. Children need the security and growth environment which comes from orderliness in the home.
- B. Some very important items that bring chaos and unpredictability:
 - 1. Inconsistent parental moral standards and expectations (Genesis 18:19).
Manoah (Judges 13:8) and David (1 Kings 2:1-4) show great wisdom regarding their children.
 - 2. Conflict and divorce (Malachi 2:16; Ephesians 4:26; James 1:19).
 - a) Since the family is the building block of outstanding societies, children need strong backgrounds in the sanctity of marriage and the faithfulness of commitment.
 - b) Their lives will be limitlessly better and more satisfied if they learn to reject sex before marriage and adultery after marriage.
 - c) Theodore Hesburgh wrote, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." This may sound bad for a preacher to say, but I want your friends to be jealous of how solid your marriage is!

Conclusion. We give our children a lot of (eternally) worthless gifts. There is nothing necessarily wrong with providing them perishable objects (cp. 1 Peter 1:18) that they want and that bring them joy when we have the means to do so. But doing so to the exclusion of imperishable and precious concepts that provide eternal joy and life is to contribute to their spiritual delinquency, and fail in your duty as a parent. And though we may scoff at such, God certainly does not (Matthew 18:1-6).