

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My eight-year-old is asking some difficult questions about Hell. I don't want to scare him, but I want to give him good answers. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: You may very well scare him; everything about Hell is scary.... also tragic and overwhelmingly sad. It is important that your 8-year-old get his information from you in accurate and honest conversations. (According to polls, most people in the U.S. believe in some form of Heaven; a tiny minority believe in Hell. Significantly, Jesus speaks more often of Hell/eternal torment/fire than Heaven.) I challenge you to search the Bible for an accurate understanding and a picture of Hell. Otherwise, you will rely on opinion, myth and conjecture.

Often, children have a much more complete and accurate understanding of God's character than many adults. Most children clearly understand the concept of punishment. They have no trouble believing in their parents' love even when they are punished. Children have a clear (although simplistic) awareness of justice and fairness. It is not a huge intellectual leap for them to fathom a God who is perfectly loving AND perfectly just. Frankly, they want him to be both. It is usually adults who naively wish to accept the "love of God" without the "holiness of God." They recreate God in more palatable image, in keeping with their way of life, to assuage their own consciences.

Suggestions:

1. Familiarize yourself with what the Bible actually says about Hell. Don't rely on opinions and fantasy.
2. Have heart-to-heart conversations about what you have learned, opening your Bible frequently. Be aware of an 8-year-old's attention span.
3. Practice explaining metaphors, figurative language, images and descriptions in 8-year-old language.
4. Emphasize the promise of forgiveness, Heaven and eternal life.
5. Make certain your child knows he can be sure he is going to Heaven.
6. Talk about the importance of evangelism and knowing the Good News of the Gospel.
7. Handle questions about specific people who have died by stating that we must fully trust in the goodness and fairness of God, because we cannot look into the heart of anyone and be 100% sure of where he/she will spend eternity.

Your child will take his cue from you. Don't be afraid or uncomfortable to talk about eternal realities. Maintain a mood of sorrow and seriousness when it comes to this topic, but follow it with the joy and hope of Heaven for those who believe.

Remember: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." JN 3:17 "God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 TM 2:4

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