

But the Great Question Remains: How Shall We Win Our Loved Ones to Christ?

by Arthur Vess

To win our loved ones to Christ, we must first make sure of our own right relationship to Him, live the Christ life in their presence, and lead them to Him through prayer, fasting, and spiritual instruction.

Scripture: Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 22:15, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 7:16, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:20, 1 Timothy 5:8, Hebrews 12:11, 1 Peter 3:1

Topics: "Evangelism", "Discipleship"

Description

Arthur Vess emphasizes the importance of ensuring our own right relationship with Christ before guiding others. He stresses the need for a vibrant Christian life to influence loved ones positively and lead them to Christ through prayer, fasting, and a radiant trust in God. Vess highlights the significance of spiritual instruction, discipline, and restraint in nurturing children's faith. He urges parents to prioritize their children's spiritual well-being, starting early, and continuing to lead them to Christ and keep them saved. Vess also addresses the challenges faced by Christian companions living with unsaved partners, encouraging perseverance and strategic efforts to win them over.

Transcript

1. We must be sure of our own right relationship to Christ and them.

If we are dead and dry in our own experience, we cannot help them to a real, bright and clear Christian experience. If we are earth-minded, careless and prayerless, we have nothing to offer them until we get right ourselves. We must have a living fire in our own hearts, shining out through our eyes, and radiating through our own words and deeds, if we would impress and win them for Christ. A dead soul cannot give life to a dead soul. Backslidden parents and companions cannot lead their loved ones to Christ.

2. Our next responsibility and opportunity is to live the Christ Life in the presence of our loved ones.

It takes a holy life to generate holy influence. Christian carefulness, in word and deed, should be our daily conduct. We must watch our conversation around the table and family circle. We must avoid questionable remarks in their presence. We must be especially careful in our expressions about other Christians and ministers of the gospel. We must also be more careful in our business dealings, not only to deal according to Bible principles to impress our loved ones and all others that we are more in love with our fellows than

with their property. We must lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven in the form of the souls of our precious loved ones, instead of material wealth on earth. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

3. If we are to win our loved ones for Christ, we must do it through prayer, and even fastings.

In different cases earnest and constant prayer and fastings will be very much needed: "Howbeit, such cometh not but by prayer and fastings." If we are not earnest enough to fast, can we expect God to answer? If we could see them in hell, we would fast and pray. It is so easy to get wrapped up in caring for the bodies of our loved ones until we forget that they have a soul. A Christian friend of mine who is now in heaven, got so burdened for his family until he could not rest until he had done his best to lead them to Christ. As he was converted later in life, most of his large family had grown up in sin, and some of them were married. After prayer and fasting, he felt that he should invite all his children in for a special dinner. He was especially prayerful and careful in providing and preparing the dinner. When it was ready, he served all the plates in a most careful manner, but his own plate was left empty. When his children noted that his plate was not served, they asked why, and insisted that he serve himself as well as them. By this time his burden for his lost family had so overpowered him that he pushed back his chair from the table and brokedown and cried out, "Oh how can I eat any dinner when all my family are lost?" The Spirit of God so moved his unconverted children until they broke into tears and weepings, and dinner was forgotten and a revival broke out instead. Falling on their knees around the table, most, if not all, of his large family were gloriously converted. Several of them became ministers and useful Christians and still are the backbone of his Church. Doubtless as he looks down from heaven on them, his heart breaks out in praise to God that he prayed and fasted until his words gripped and broke their hearts. Many times our words are too dead and our efforts too tame. Why? If we would only take the same careful precautions and preparations, and then put forth as much interest for the souls of our families as we do their bodies, many of them now lost would be saved.

4. Then we should manifest a radiant, trustful attitude toward God and our loved ones.

We cannot win them to Christ in careless neglect; neither can we win them by being blue and despondent about them all the while. If our salvation does not satisfy us, how can we expect others to want it? There is a difference in religious blues and a burden for the lost, born in faith and gratitude toward God and in tender love for our lost ones. We can feel a deep concern, and yet trust God while we carry it. Our radiant, trustful tears will awaken their consciences and make them long for what we possess. A minister's wife prayed all night for her lost son in a distant city and came home from church the next morning shouting. The son who was restless all night decided to come home and get saved at the very hour that his mother "prayed through" and began shouting the victory. Mixing faith, love and confidence with our soul burdens ties on to God and us. "According to our faith, so be it unto you."

5. Parents should take special time for the spiritual instruction of their children at the family altar and at other times.

The deep impressions made on children's minds and consciences warrant any and every effort. Hearing their parents call their name in prayer, or listening to their kindly instructions and admonitions, move children's hearts more than we know. When I was a small child, I came home from the field for water one day. Just before I entered the home, I heard my mother praying. I stopped and heard her mention my name in prayer. My childish heart almost stood still, and I listened a moment, and was so overcome that I

whirled and hurried back to my work without the water.

There is a thirst in human hearts for God and reality greater than their thirst for natural bread and water -- if our parents only realized it in time. My father used to pray through down between the old plow handles in the field, and go shouting across the field with tears of holy joy running down his cheeks. I would almost scream out for the religion that my father so greatly enjoyed. Our family worship should afford a special time to refresh and instruct us. Instead of waiting till we are tired and worn, until we cannot really pray, we should select a time best suited for the most important part of our family life, and worship God in Spirit and in truth.

We should make it a time of reverence and thanksgiving. It is a good time to sing some hymn or spiritual song and make melody in our hearts and in our homes. This is a good time to inquire into the children's spiritual needs and conditions and give testimony to God's wonderful grace and help. We should not make our worship too long and formal, but we should vary it to meet the needs of the family or other friends present. Then special personal instruction should be given to each member of the family at set times.

John Wesley's mother only had nineteen children besides her duties as a pastor's wife, but she gave one hour of personal instruction to each child each week. But you say, "I just cannot take time for such duties." Time for what? Which is worth most? The bodies or the souls of our family? "Life is worth more than meat, and the body more than raiment." "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (food and raiment) shall be added unto you." God provides our food and raiment through natural laws, but our souls are only fed as we will it and take time to have it so.

How oft we feed the bodies of our children and other loved ones, and then send them out with starving souls. How much time do you spend with your children's souls? A young woman in a Christian school got under conviction, and weeping, cried out, "Neither my father nor my mother have ever spoken to me about my soul." The father was a minister and of official rank who made a practice of telling others about this great salvation, but never mentioned it to his children. Was he sincere?

Another father lived so close to God that his children would brake down and run to the altar when he would speak to them about their souls. Another father with a large family, would get them all down and pray them up or through in preparation for the revival? To which class do you belong? We do not claim that even all children will heed their parent's lives and messages, but it is a sin not to give them the example and messages.

6. When shall we lead our loved ones to Christ?

We cannot do it too early, but we may wait too late. The devil begins in their early months and years. Let us beat him to them. We must begin while they are young and tender, or wait till they are hard and rebellious. We must do our best to get them in before they are tied up to sinful companions and habits, before their important choices are made without Christ. Let us not feel that they are all right until they grow up and disgrace us in rebellion against God and all we have ever lived for. Let us not wait till the devil gets them and then worry over it. Children learn more in the first three years of their lives than in any other like period. The first seed sown in their hearts spring up first. Most great men and women have been converted in early childhood. Bishop Taylor was converted at 6 years, Richard Baxter at 3 years, Dr. Godbey at 4 years, J. A. Wood at 10 years, John Fletcher at 7 years, Bishop Asbury at 7 years, Adoniram Judson at 12 years, Adam Clarke at 4 years, Matthew Henry at 10 years, Jonathan Edwards at 6 years, Isaac Watts at 8 years, and Robert Moffatt at 10 years. How old were you when you were converted? How

old, and how many of your children or other loved ones are saved? What have you done about it? What are going to do about it? WHEN? Many die in youth or childhood.

We cannot tantalize or force our loved ones to be Christian, but we can keep loving and watching for a chance to woo or warn them. Keep at it; the devil never lets them rest, but approaches them every time from every angle and at every turn of the road. Does he hate them more than we love them? To train up a child in the way it should go does not mean to turn them loose and let them go. Most people wait till it is too late to win their loved ones. There are many short coffins and graves, and many grown ups in sin who once were tender and hungry for God.

7. We must discipline and restrain our children until they are saved and afterward.

If they do not know how to yield to their parents, they will not know how to yield to God. A young man once came to my office, in a Christian school, under conviction for sin and said to me: "I have always had my own way at home and every other place until I do not know how to surrender to God." Eli's sons were vile and he restrained them not." Do you? When we are lax and loose with our children, we are making rebels of them. "He that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him be times."

But you say, "Oh, but I love my child too much to punish him!" You do not agree with God who said, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son." "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." When it hurts it helps. It is easy to let sympathy smother out our intelligent love. Restraint is difficult, but it is a parental duty. When to say no and yes: when to let them go and when to make them stay is the test of our love and better judgment. When it endangers their morals or souls, say no.

Let us be kind but firm. Parents must decide and act together. If father tells them to do one thing and mother another, authority is divided and destroyed. When mother butts in when father is correcting the child, his influence is canceled, and the child rebels against his own soul and resents his own protection. Parents disagreeing and arguing in the presence of their children is one of the most fatal sins against themselves and their children. Interfering with discipline so sorely needed in this rebellious generation is a crime against God and your children.

Do not plead the child's case. But back your companion in his or her effort to hold them in the right path. When the father is administering corporal punishment, the mother must not butt in, though the child may scream and cry. If he cries, "Oh you are killing me, etc.," just remember that it helps when it hurts, and "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die," though he does yell like it. Of course the rod is not the only remedy, but it is the most needed remedy these days, because the most neglected.

Parents should never give way in anger and beat their children, but they must be firm and kind, or lose their children. Where there are so many allurements all about them, there must be a strong, loving, restraining hand, or our children will drift and rush to destruction with the wrong crowd. It takes more love to hold them in and lead them to Christ, than it does to relieve our nerves by letting them go to destruction. It must be done in the right spirit, with the right purpose ever before us -- for their good, not our vengeance. "Father's, provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

We must not embarrass or humiliate them in the presence of others, except in extreme and rare cases. Many mothers and fathers bring up their children in idleness, while they themselves become slaves for

their children, with the result that their children become slave masters over their parents. If you want your children to love you, let them serve you. Receiving makes one selfish, while giving and helping others makes one unselfish and kind. If you raise your children in idleness, they will waste your substance and may let you die in the poor house, while they die in the prison house.

Luxury and laziness ruin more children than all other things. Let them learn to bear responsibility and learn to work hard and long if you want to save them. "Idle brains are the devil's workshop and idle hands are his tools."

8. We must take our children to Sunday School and have them stay for church if we want them to be Christians.

If we send them to church and stay at home ourselves, they will soon follow our example instead of the preacher. If we take them to church and then turn them loose to roam the streets while we stay for church, the devil and the wrong crowd will get them. I thank God for strict parents who took me to church and Sunday School and kept me till all was over. Did you ever hear any one say, "I thank God for lax parents who sent me to church while they stayed at home?" Or, "I thank God that my parents let me go home while they enjoyed church?" No, and you never will. Children raised like that do not thank God or their parents. If they stay in school all week, they should be able to remain in church a short while on Sunday. You may lose them after you do your best, but you will never win them to Christ by letting them neglect His house and run to swift destruction. It is here that they learn to reverence God and their parents. Irreverence and rebellion go together in this generation. You must hold them in while they form the right habits and get right with God. Teach them to respect God and his house and you will never be sorry.

9. Then you should lead them to Christ by leading them to the altar.

It is not commendable for parents who profess high states of grace to stand still while the spirit of God moves in the service, and never invite their children to the altar or pray for them if they do go. So oft I have had parents ask me to invite their children to the altar when they had not done so themselves. Human love, plus divine love, ought to do more than divine love alone. If you have not lived so that your children trust you and want your religion, confess your sin and ask their forgiveness, and get something that you can recommend to them. If you have lived right before them, do not let the devil bluff you out. When they grow up and live or die in sin, you will hate your cowardice when it is too late. If our parents would do their duty before, during and after the revival, pastors and evangelists would find it easier to help them win their loved ones to Christ. Let us put their salvation first; all else second.

When our loved ones come to the altar to seek God, let us avoid the two extremes of either being too careless and harsh, or too soft and indulgent. God loves our children, but he does not allow any more for them than others. They must repent, confess and forsake their sins before God can save them. Tears and compassion, mixed with our exhortations will give them courage and determination to yield all to God so that he can save them. We cannot force them to be Christians against their will; neither can we force God to save them against his holy commandments. They must meet his conditions before he can meet their need. It does not take a seeking soul long to find a seeking Saviour. We must put their salvation before food, clothes, education, sleep or any other fleeting earthly interest. If we are more interested in the newspaper than the Bible, and in the latest radio news than we are in hearing from heaven, our children will not be well impressed by our lack of piety. If they are not saved, let it be their fault, not our responsibility.

10. Finally, for our children, it is not enough to get them well saved; we must do all in our power to keep them saved.

The greatest sin of parents and churches is to get souls saved and then leave them to their enemies, without further manifested interest. If mothers gave their new-born babes no more care and attention than most parents and churches do their young converts, this generation would be the last one on earth. Spasmodic religion will not do for us or our loved ones. We must watch over, counsel and pray for and with our converted loved ones. Be careful about criticizing them for their faults and blunders, but encourage, comfort and instruct them in the way of God more perfectly. This fleeting life will soon be over.

They soon grow up and drift out into the world without us. Let us get them right and keep them right and we shall have less to regret. I shall never forget the first time I went away from home to work when I was a boy Christian. My mother was silent for a few moments while her throat cleared up, and then she said : "Arthur, I could never stand to see you go out into the world alone if you were not a Christian." As I crossed the old rail fence across my path, I broke down and cried, and thanked God that I had Christ to go with me and comfort mother while I was away.

Forty years have passed since that parting, and that same wonderful Christ has gone with me up and down the paths of life and helped me to live so that I am not afraid for my mother or my own children to know my record or follow my unworthy example. Those who grew up in my home and community without Christ have taught me what it would have cost me not to be a Christian. Children, young people and other unsaved loved ones in your home; may I have a word with you? How are you responding to the good lives and influences of those who love and live for Christ and you in your home?

After they have done their best, you can reject their invitation and turn Christ away from your lives and be lost forever. Mother's prayers may follow you the whole life through, but you will have to give up your sin and rebellion and return to God or die and be separated from them and lost from God and your loved ones forever. Mothers prayers are not enough; only God can save you, and he cannot save you without your yielding consent. Unsaved husband or wife, how long will you make it hard on your Christian companion by neglecting or rebelling against their God and your own soul?

Why delay and grieve God and your loved one and lose your own soul. Humble yourself now and yield all to God before it is too late to pray. If you are too wrapped up in the things of time to pray or repent, ask yourself this question: "What shall it profit a man or woman if he or she shall gain the whole world and lose his or her own soul?" Your companion has fought a hard battle without your help and encouragement. Will you not join them now before it is too late for you and your children charged to you, as much as to your companion.

If we can save our homes, we can save our nation and the world. If our homes are lost, all is lost. Let us arrange now with God and heaven to have a happy family circle here, and a happier family reunion in heaven.

11. Just a final word to that struggling Christian companion who has to live with an unsaved husband or wife.

We know how lonely and tried you often become, fighting your battles all alone or often against the evil influence of that unsaved loved one, but you must not give up till the last effort is made and the last day has been lived. Do not tease and worry your unsaved loved one until you drive them away ; neither give

them up in indifference or despair. Select your opportunities and do all in your power to win them, and to get them under the influence of other Christians who want to help you.

Be very careful not to say anything about your trials or fellow Christians which might discourage them or give them grounds for bitterness or criticism of other Christians. If you do not always hold up so well under their opposition or abuse, when you realize your failure, fix your part and go on with God. There is nothing to go back to, and they will never be saved by your surrender. They are watching your life and being oft influenced when they would not let you know it for anything.

It is their misery that makes them so hateful. One godless husband had tried his wife for years and was almost ready to yield to God. But he said to himself, "I am going to try my wife to the limit once more: if she holds up under the trial I shall yield to God myself." With the bitterest words he abused and misused her. The same devil who inspired him to so use her said to her, "You have stood it long enough: there is no hope for him and you cannot live longer under it just give up and give him what is coming to him and have it all over with."

She yielded and gave him a terrible scathing for his wickedness and abuse through all the long years. Where upon he broke down and cried and replied, "Wife I had been watching you for all this time and had planned to yield to God if you had stood under this trial." God bless our Christian companions who endure such abuse and contradiction from unsaved loved ones. You cannot afford to give up and over. Your own soul and that of your children are at stake. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood."

"Be thou faithful in death and I will give thee a crown of life that fadeth not away," as do all earthly things. The toils of the road will seem nothing when he or she tumbles in and is soundly converted. The family altar will be blessed when he or she joins in. But if they do not yield, the end will come to your struggles when begins a never ending world of joy and victory, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Win your children if possible. Often hard fathers are won by the tears of little children when they resist all others.

Then we have the problem of living with unsaved brothers and sisters. It is a common thing for those of the same household to be divided here and hereafter. Salvation is a personal matter. One brother or sister may become a devout and humble Christian, while another rebels and lives a life of sin and shame. I knew two boys who grew up in the same Christian home with a godly minister for their father. One yielded to God and is now preaching the gospel; the other made plenty of money, lived the life of a drunkard; died in the chain gang and was sent home in a rough prison coffin.

It is up to you young people, as to which road you take, the kind of life you live and the kind of death you die; as well as the influence you leave behind for coming generations, while you are in heaven or in hell. When our loved ones are going from us, our greatest joy will be that we have been faithful and won them to Christ. Our greatest sorrow will be that we have neglected their souls and that they may have died unprepared. What we or they have gained of earthly wealth will fade as worthless as nothing, when we or they pass beyond and leave behind a train of sorrow and a wail of woe.

Just a word of confidential confession to awaken us all to the fact that our earth relations will soon be separated in death. In my childhood my own dear father was a noble and devout Christian whose life made deep and lasting impressions on my young life. While he died a nobleman, I do not know how it was with his soul. During the years he got mixed up in church quarrels and became bitter and revengeful and lost interest in spiritual things. He largely substituted his newspaper for his Bible, and the family altar died down.

Some years later I was converted and endured much trials because of his bitter attitudes. More years passed and God helped me to live so that he trusted me as no other boy that he had. In later years I was out walking in the orchard back of the old home. When I chanced to return to the house, my precious father was sitting out on the porch, leaning his head on his arm on the post of his chair. A heavenly voice spoke very definitely to me saying, "Go and put your arms around your father's neck and tell him how much you love and appreciate him and his faithfulness in laboring to bring you up; and then tell him how you remember the devoted Christian life that he once lived.

Then tell him, how much you long for him to come back and live like he once lived." My frame trembled and the tears flowed. I saw later why, I was so moved upon, but the devil said, "Do not do it; your father will not understand or appreciate it. He has never kissed you since your childhood and does not care for such softness, etc." I battled with great emotion as I then looked on My father, whose picture on the porch that day I still remember as yesterday. But I finally yielded and let him pass unwarned and unsaved.

A year or so later I found out why I was so moved that day to win my own precious father back to God. While I was working on the bank building at West Asheville, N. C., a neighbor boy came across the street, looked up and called to me: "Mr. Vess, your father is dead." So stunned I could not realize it, I staggered down confused and bewildered with the awful and sudden shock. When I came to myself, I cried out in agony because my father was dead, and because I had failed to warn him some months before, when God was trying to get him ready for that hour through his unworthy son.

While writing these lines the tears again flow, but it is forever too late to warn or win my precious father. He died after only an hour or so of terrible and unexpected illness, only a few months younger than I am now. But you say, "How did he die?" I do not know; only that he died praying while suffering awful agony in body and soul. He believed in "Eternal Security" too long, I fear. As I looked on his dead form and saw the hands that had toiled for me, I remembered my last opportunity to warn and woo him when it was forever past.

What about our loved ones who are still with us and will soon be parted from us by our death or theirs? What are we doing about it? Letting them grow up or live on unwarned and unsaved? Let us win them before it is too late, when we have to look on their dead bodies, forsaken by their lost souls, when "the harvest is past and the summer is ended and they are not saved." When we meet them at the judgment, and some shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. What about that last good-bye or good morning forever. Which will it be? Much depends on how we live and the interest we take in them here and now. Do not delay, but win them today.

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/arthur-vess/but-the-great-question-remains-how-shall-we-win-our-loved-ones-to-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

