

**Q & A with Dr. Michelle Anthony**  
**Author of *Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today's Families***

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**How is *Spiritual Parenting* different from other parenting books?**

At its core, *Spiritual Parenting* is not a book on “how to parent.” It’s a book about how to view your *role* as a spiritually minded parent, the God-given role that is yours alone. This book is designed to inspire you—to awaken you, if you will, toward a greater perspective about the spiritual role of parenting.

**Many parents believe entrust their children’s spiritual lives to “professionals” like pastors and Sunday School teachers. Why don’t you support this philosophy?**

We cannot afford to relegate spiritual discussions to an hour on Sunday, not when parents have influence over and access to their children’s hearts throughout the week—and the Holy Spirit is on the job 24/7! Spiritual parenting, as a philosophy, encourages us to parent with eternity in mind, highlighting faith as it affects every area of family life. I believe we need to drop the wall between secular and sacred, because the trajectory of our children’s hearts and beliefs influences every part of their lives.

**What is the goal of spiritual parenting?**

We parents should be in the business of putting our children in the path of the divine. Rather than seeking to control their behavior (doing the right things, saying the right words), we should be seeking to help our children fall in love with Jesus. I’ve described the goal of spiritual parenting this way:

The passing on a vibrant and transforming faith, the kind of faith in which:

- My children would *know* and *hear* God’s voice, discerning it from all others;
- They would *desire* to obey Him when they heard His voice;
- They would *obey* Him not in their own power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our goal as parents should be to endeavor to pass down our faith to the next generation in such a way that they will be able to pass down their faith to the following generation in our absence. Someday we won’t be here, and all that will remain is that which is eternal—those things that we have successfully transferred to our children, and our children’s children, so that faith will endure to all generations.

**What’s the first step into spiritual parenting?**

One thing is especially true of spiritual parenting: *you can’t give away something you don’t have!* It’s our job to model with authenticity what we have in our relationship with God through Christ. Our children hunger to see the reality of who God is in the natural flow of our lives—when we’re getting up, when we’re sitting down, when we’re on a journey, when we’re putting them to bed. It’s not that the formalized methodology is bad, because it definitely has a place. It’s just that it’s not *best* apart from a role model. Our children need to see that faith matters, that it’s relevant to our daily situations, that it’s real. We need to model how our lives are spiritual in every decision. They need to witness firsthand that our faith is not merely something we compartmentalize when it’s convenient to do so.

**It’s easy to obsess over controlling my child’s behavior. Am I responsible for changing my child’s actions?**

So often our temptation as parents is to spend time and energy striving to fix our children’s behavior—a process that is not our responsibility. As we put our children in proximity to God, to fall in love with Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes their actions congruent with their belief. He’s the one who causes the process of their hearts to become more and more like Jesus’. This is true transformation. What is our job then? The joy of parenting can be spent on cultivating environments for our children’s faith to grow, teaching them how to cultivate a love relationship with Jesus as we cultivate our own, living our lives authentically in front of them so that they become eyewitnesses to our own transformation.

**Your book highlights ten environments that give the Holy Spirit room to bring about spiritual growth. Why the focus on environments?**

The value of creating these environments is in our “making room” for the Holy Spirit to work! If the Holy Spirit is God’s chosen teacher in our children’s hearts and He is the one who causes spiritual growth when and as He chooses, then we should be eager to cultivate environments for Him to do this work. Parents can create environments that allow children to not only hear God’s words but also to put them into practice. As we seek to create these spiritual spaces, we also pray – we pray that God’s Spirit will transform our children into His likeness.

**The first environment you describe is storytelling. How does it help to develop faith?**

While today’s culture is telling our children that life is “all about me,” we can remind them that life is really “all about God.” God’s Word is basically a love story—a story of the Lover pursuing His created ones in order to have an intimate relationship with each one of them. In His story, *He* is the main character; *He* is the perfect Lover and the perfect Redeemer.

I am tempted to believe that I am the main character, that the story is really about me—because after all, I am in every scene. But that's a lie. It's a lie that our children are told on every TV channel, in every advertisement, and in every song. Sometimes it's blatant and sometimes sublime, but nonetheless they are being made to believe that the greatest story ever told is happening in their obscure little world. However, if we consistently help our children see the bigger story that has been lived out for thousands of years, they will have the privilege of catching a glimpse of the wonder of it all. When this happens, we are able to worship God and not ourselves. We are free to be who we were created to be: true worshippers in every aspect of our lives!

**You encourage parents to shape an environment of “identity” to allow the Holy Spirit to move in their children. Explain how that works.**

Each of us was created in God's image. We bear His fingerprint—and no two are alike. At the end of our season of parenting, don't we ultimately want children who look like Christ? That is a much higher than simply trying to keep our children from embarrassing us in public, right? So how will we accomplish this?

- We must repent from the temptation to create and mold our children into our own image.
- We must die to ourselves and our personal ambitions for our children and sincerely seek God every day, asking Him to reveal His plan for them.
- We must recognize afresh the larger storyline that God is writing—His grand redemptive narrative in which each of us has a part to play. This includes our children. We don't want them to miss out on the unique contribution that God created them to fulfill.

When we recognize our true identities in Christ, as well as our children's identities, we can be ready to embrace what God has in store for our children. Having a strong identity in Christ will guide their choices in ways that parents simply cannot.

**You believe parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of their children. Do parents need to partner with churches to raise spiritual children?**

We weren't created to live in isolation. We weren't meant to do this thing called the Christian life alone. Without being involved in a vibrant faith community, we can begin to live secluded lives of faith. When this happens, we literally start to forget who we are. As I mentioned in the earlier question, our identity has a profound impact on the way we live and the choices we make. What we believe about who we are and where we aim our heart determines the outcome of our lives for eternity. As the battle rages against our identity, the faith community brings us strength.

God designed the faith community to build up each believer for this battle that we face when we leave the security of “family.” This faith community offers a support system among people who are like-minded, who believe the same truths, and who ultimately want the same things out of this life. These shared beliefs and values provide a powerful foundation for our children, especially during their developmental years. And as our children grow older, weekends at church or faith-inspired events within a vibrant community of believers give our children a momentary reprieve from the world's pressures and antagonistic jeers.

**The environment of serving seems particularly influential for tweens and teens. What is the critical question this environment asks a young person?**

The critical question that service asks is simply, “What needs to be done?” This is one of the best questions you can teach your children to ask, and I believe it is critical to their faith development. To have them walk into any room, situation, or relationship and ask this one question will change the way they see their world. It's simple. It's profound. Yet this is a posture that will *not* naturally be cultivated in your children unless you set out on an intentional course, making it a priority.

I believe acts of service are especially powerful for youth when we pull away the guardrails and encourage them to put their faith into action as the Holy Spirit leads them. Instead of saying to our preteens and teens, “You need show up on this day, at this time and bring this amount of money ... and then you'll be able to put your faith into action,” we need to let them depend on God's Spirit to tell them as *they* ask the question for themselves.

This generation needs something epic to live for. They need a cause and an understanding of who God is and what His kingdom is all about. In order to be prepared to be part of such an epic battle, our children need the environment of service to train their hearts upward and outward. Without it, this generation will settle for something far less than what God has called them to. They settle for the fruit of selfishness—the vanity of the mundane.

***Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today's Families***

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