

# For Heaven's Sake!

## Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully

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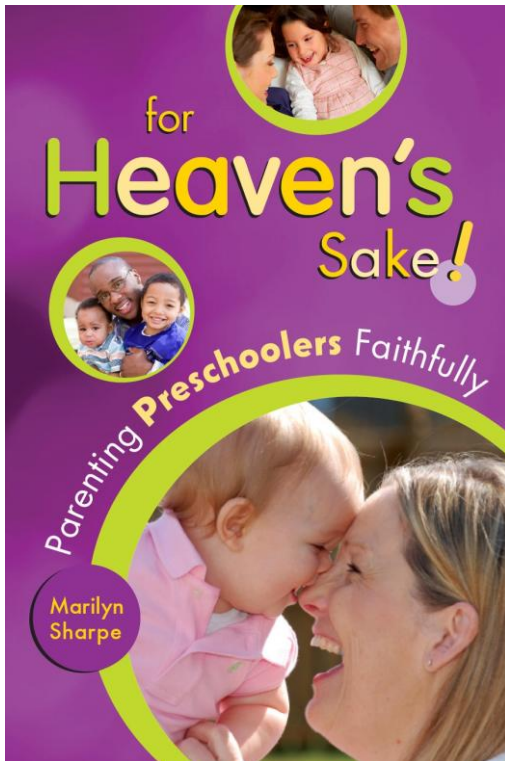
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# For Heaven's Sake!

## Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully

By Marilyn Sharpe

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**Marilyn Sharpe** is a mother, grandmother, and parent educator, with a deep love for families and for nurturing faith in all of life. She is also a writer, speaker, and congregational coach. A passionate, lifelong learner, Marilyn has a BA from Wellesley College, an MA from Harvard University, and is a Certified Family Life Educator.

In *For Heaven's Sake! Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully* Marilyn Sharpe helps us examine what it means to understand parenting as a quintessentially spiritual journey.

Based on thirty years of gathering incredible parents every week to share their stories, struggles, triumphs, and lived wisdom, this realistic, encouraging, and supportive book is a treasure for all who want to nurture faith in Jesus Christ in the home.

Full of practical suggestions for daily life together, this new volume will be your companion and guide as you navigate this formative time in your child's life, while using proven methods for raising great preschoolers.

*For Heaven's Sake!* brings together the wisdom of the experts—those in the field of child development, those who daily live with and shape the lives of children, and by children themselves.

Ideal for parents, grandparents, teachers, and childcare providers.

To order copies of *For Heaven's Sake! Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully* call Toll Free (888) 696-1828 or visit [www.Kirkhouse.com](http://www.Kirkhouse.com).

For review copies (for media), exam copies (for potential classroom use) or to interview the author please e-mail Bob Todd at [BT@BobToddPublicity.com](mailto:BT@BobToddPublicity.com)

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## What People Are Saying

“It needs to be repeated over and over again: **the most important religious influence on children is their parents and their family's faith practices!** Parents, and churches, are looking for trusted ways to nurture the faith life of young children today. Now Marilyn Sharpe has written a hopeful, practical resource for parents to use in developing a vibrant faith in their children and the whole family. Marilyn's style shines through every page with illustrative stories, insightful wisdom, and practical ideas that parents can use immediately. If you want to learn how to develop a vibrant faith in young children, this is the book every parent, and church leader, should read.”

—**John Roberto**, President, LifelongFaith Associates

“Sharpe reflects her passion for the care and learning of children in this insightful and easily read book. Weaving scripture and story throughout the narrative, each chapter engages and challenges the reader to embrace each child as a gift and uniquely gifted by God, while providing a clear understanding and use of the “best practices” and processes through which children learn and are nurtured. This is quite a body of work! It has caused me to reflect on a number of issues parents (and teachers) face in the day-to-day nurture of children. I look forward to recommending, purchasing, and sharing copies of this book with parents, teachers, and early childhood educators.”

—**Dr. Judith Christian**, Director, Children's Ministry and Family Ministry, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

“Marilyn Sharpe is truly one of God's faithful servants. She has taught, encouraged, accompanied, and supported parents at Mt. Olivet Church for more than 30 years. *For Heaven's Sake: Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully* captures her commitment to exceptional and faithful parenting, and now makes it available to all parents. She has put into meaningful words many of the concepts that parents of young children want to understand. With warm humor and gentle presence, she shares rich stories and practical ways that parents do this vitally important work of raising God's children in today's world. My wife Nancy and I highly recommend this book to you!”

—**Rev. Dr. Paul M. Youngdahl**, Senior Pastor, Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN

“Marilyn Sharpe is unique. Her effusive way of expressing herself flows like a warm balm over the listener's ears. Her faith permeates all the way into her DNA and touches those around her. Her love of children comes from years as a compassionate mom and grandma, whether in her own family, her congregation or community. And her ability to equip parents gives confidence to insecure and worried mothers and fathers.

Marilyn brings all of this to her new book *FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully*. She builds a case that preschoolers are spiritual beings seeking connectedness to others and exploring their world with awe and wonder. Parents play a huge role in nurturing this spark of faith. Grounded in the Vibrant Faith Ministries model of effective faith formation practices, Marilyn's book provides practical, field-tested methods for equipping parents to be godbearers for their children. Parents who read this book will not only know why it's important to speak the language of faith to their children, but they'll know how to do it.

While her book equips parents and adults for faithful parenting, her methods help parents go deeper in their own faith journey. Based upon the premise that “faith is caught more than taught”, the reader will discover they are entering into a deeper life of faith. Lots of parenting books teach us how to raise children. This one facilitates

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the work of the Spirit within the reader as well. Be prepared to grow personally even as you watch your child develop.

For more than 25 years Marilyn has met with parents on a weekly basis listening to their concerns and traveling with them on the parenting journey. I've interviewed some of these parents and they tell me they find spiritual comfort, energy, wisdom and guidance in their classes with Marilyn. You'll want this experience!

Vibrant Faith Ministries proudly endorses *For Heaven's Sake!* and is delighted to offer it through our bookstore. This book will help parents enrich their own faith and that of their children!"

—**Dr. Paul Hill**, Executive Director, Vibrant Faith Ministries

"Are you the parent of a preschooler, wondering how to raise your child with an authentic Christian faith? Are you a Christian grandparent (or aunt, uncle, friend or neighbor), wondering how you can have a loving and powerful influence? Are you looking for the ideal gift for a family with young children? Look no further. Order this book now!

Within the framework of a vibrant Christian faith, Marilyn Sharpe has provided positive, practical advice for parents (and grandparents, or other significant adults) of preschool children. Her examples are realistic; her suggestions combine sound theology and sound psychology of child development. Discipline, eating, toilet-training, teaching values, communicating faith, it's all there: a parenting book with a huge difference. This book will touch your heart and give you confidence.

Be prepared to be blessed, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE."

— **Susan Weller**, social worker, parent, and grandparent

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## About the Author



### *Marilyn Hagstrum Sharpe –*

Marilyn Sharpe knows it's all about faith! She is the principal of Marilyn Sharpe Ministries, LLC, dedicated to helping congregations equip households to nurture faith in all of the generations, all of the time, wherever they are. She is a congregational coach, trainer, writer, presenter, speaker, retreat leader and teacher. She presents with energy, passion, and contagious enthusiasm.

A parent for 38 years and a grandparent for six years, Marilyn knows firsthand the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and challenges of being a family. She believes that all Christian adults are called to be faith parents to God's children. A Certified Family Life Educator, Marilyn has been a parent educator for 32 years, committed to helping parents become the best and most effective they can be. She teaches parents to celebrate their strengths, give and receive support, and glean wisdom from other parents. Marilyn helps faith parents and congregations work together to pass on faith and values to the children we all cherish. She knows that all the generations bring gifts to the body of Christ and that connecting them is essential.

Formerly a high school English teacher and a confirmation teacher and director for 23 years, Marilyn has a passion for kids and their families. She believes that families are the classroom for teaching all that is most important, the crucible for refining the best in each of us, and a safe harbor from life's storms.

With a BA from Wellesley College and an MA from Harvard University, she takes extraordinary joy in both learning and teaching. Marilyn is adjunct faculty at Luther Seminary and Concordia University, St. Paul, MN.

Marilyn has written a monthly column, Positive Parenting, for five years for *The Metro Lutheran*; a series of articles on children, youth, and family ministry for *The Clergy Journal*; and articles for *Lifelong Faith Journal*, *Lutheran Partners*, *Seasons of the Spirit*, *The Advocate*, *Home Base*, and *Connect*. She has done a series of podcasts on faithful parenting for Common Good Radio.

If you would like to learn more about Marilyn Sharpe's ministries, please contact her, using the information below:

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### 1. Why did you write this book?

The short answer is that my husband, my parenting group participants, and my colleagues wore me down. For decades, in response to encouragement to write a book, I staunchly maintained, “I don’t write books; I talk them!”

Because I have learned so much from other parents and because I have such persistent passions, both for growing strong and healthy families and for nurturing faith in all of God’s children, I finally relented.

Too many former and current participants in my parenting group have proclaimed, “This group saved my life!” It is not I who have saved anyone’s life; I was simply privileged to journey with this ever-changing, always remarkable group of men and women. But it does feel like a holy responsibility to share their wisdom, their lived experiences, their stories, and their resilience with those who cannot join us at the table in person.

As the body of Christ, we have learned that, no matter how excellent the Christian education is in our congregations, it isn’t enough. Parents, grandparents, godparents, neighbors, teachers, and daycare providers all need to nurture faith in all of life.

Finally, parenting brought me to my knees, literally and figuratively. It is the most important, most humbling venture to which God has called me. I wanted, more than anything, to do it superbly well. Some moments were exemplary; many fell far short of adequate. That is when I discovered that raising the child God entrusted to me is at its heart a spiritual journey, filled with grace and forgiveness by the God who also created and, against all odds, loves me, too.

### 2. How is this book different from other parenting books?

There are many wonderful books that feature the very best parenting practices. And there are excellent books on how to nurture faith in children. Often, they are not braided together. I learned firsthand that parenting and faith formation need to be intertwined.

As a parent, a parent educator, and a follower of Jesus Christ, I wanted to weave the wisdom and promises of scripture with the very best of parenting practices. Excellent parents, who are honest about the struggles and the triumphs of family life, have generously shared their stories and their strategies.

Each chapter also features simple, daily, practical ways to nurture faith in busy family lives.

### 3. How is this book different from other Christian parenting books?

As those who are called to raise and shape God’s children, we are called to model the unconditional love God showers on us; to forgive our children as God, in Jesus Christ, forgives us daily; and to help the child in our care become all God has created this child to be. This is not a book about breaking the spirit or the will of the child, but rather it is about raising this child, filled with God’s Spirit. This is not a book about harsh punishment, but about discipline as a way of discipling children. Trust me, this is neither simple nor simplistic. It is the most important journey we will ever travel with our children.

I hope that readers will see themselves in the stories, will feel a gentle and loving friend accompany them, will be encouraged to discover how much they are doing very, very well, and will laugh at my foibles and mistakes, taking heart that amazing children grew in my family, despite some incredible mistakes I made. More than

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anything, I want parents to know that Jesus promised, promised, promised to be with them always, no matter what.

#### **4. Who is the intended audience for this book?**

I wrote this book for parents and those who serve in the role of parents. I wrote this for those who join parents in caring for their children - nursery school teachers, daycare providers, neighbors, babysitters, and all of the other adults, without whom none of us would make it.

Yes, it assumes that you want your child to have a strong and life-transforming faith in Jesus Christ. No, it doesn't mean that you have no questions or doubts yourself. It doesn't require a seminary education, but a spiritual hunger of your own. Remember, this life of faith is a journey, not just a destination.

#### **5. You write about the importance of faith parents. What is a faith parent?**

Faith parents may or may not have ever had a child of their own. These are the remarkable adults and young adults who care deeply about our children, who stay in touch with them, who affirm our children's gifts, who reflect the light of Christ into their lives, and who leave Jesus' fingerprints indelibly on the children we love.

#### **6. How might a congregation use this book?**

Certainly, this book would be a good addition to any church library. But having a personal copy allows parents to use this as a reference book.

Give a copy as a gift to new parents on the birth or baptism of their child. Use parts of the book in pre-baptism training. Suggest this book as a baby shower gift. Add it to a faith chest for the child.

Offer the book as the basis for a parenting class or read a chapter at a number of parenting group meetings. Use it for an adult forum series. (A book study is available on CD from Marilyn Sharpe Ministries.)

Use it to train your nursery school staff or your nursery workers or your preschool Sunday school teachers. Use the ideas for family activities at cross-generational Sunday school or events.

Do a family camp or retreat with the book as the theme.

#### **7. Although children all begin as preschoolers, they don't stay that way perpetually. What's next?**

Two more books in the series, *For Heaven's Sake! Parenting Gradeschoolers Faithfully* and *For Heaven's Sake! Parenting Adolescents Faithfully*, are in the works! Stay tuned.

## Ideas for Using this Book

**Read this book in any way you choose, but here are some suggestions to consider.**

### **IF YOU ARE READING ALONE**

Read a section and stop to reflect, wonder, plan, and apply it to your life. Make it your own. Annotate it. Push back on the elements with which you disagree. Try some of the ideas, just one at a time. It was never intended that you do them all or do them all at once. Name and claim the things that you are already doing well.

### **IF YOU ARE READING AS A CO-PARENT**

Read this together. Discuss it. Share what you have experienced as a parent. Be open and vulnerable with one another. Like those who read it alone, try just one new thing at a time, catching yourselves already doing some things very well.

### **IF YOU ARE READING AS A FAMILY**

Try at least one idea from the family activities at the end of each chapter. Reflect on how you might want to tailor the idea to your family. Evaluate how it went. Come up with other ideas and do them.

### **IF YOU ARE READING AS A SMALL GROUP OR CLASS OR ADULT FORUMS**

Read and discuss one chapter at a time. Share with one another your experiences of applying the ideas to your family. Ask for ideas from other participants. Problem solve the challenges you face. Celebrate the week's triumphs.

### **IF YOUR ARE DOING THIS ON A RETREAT OR AT A FAMILY CAMP**

Get books to participants ahead of the retreat or family camp. Ask adults to read before they arrive. Spend time at each session reviewing a chapter (or two or three), discussing participants' questions, sharing family experiences that illustrate the topic, and planning family activities.

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## From The Introduction

THERE IS A GLUT of parenting books on the market. Many give advice on how to raise children, featuring skills, values, and tips. There are others that focus on faith formation in children. So how is this book different?

This book assumes that you want your child to have a vibrant, life-transforming faith in Jesus Christ. It is grounded in an understanding that, as parents, it isn't enough to drive kids to the church building and let professionals, or those trained by church professionals, do the faith nurture. Faith formation is braided into the dailiness of life together, delivered with the very best parenting skills available, and grounded in unconditional love. It's our job to pass on faith.

### NURTURING FAITH AT HOME

Parenting and faith nurture are not two separate pursuits; they are most effective when practiced together as an integrated whole. The writer of Deuteronomy said it this way: "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise (6:6-7).

Okay, so this means that faith talk is supposed to suffuse all of life together. But is it really that important?

Parents are vitally important in passing on faith to children and youth. Factors in whether or not our children will have faith include what mom does, what dad does, what mom says, and what dad says. But if only one family in ten that attends church has faith-filled conversations outside the congregational building,\* how will we begin?

This book provides simple, everyday ways to nurture faith in the home by practicing the Four Keys for Nurturing Faith. They are:

- caring conversations
- family devotions
- rituals and traditions
- family service

The first four chapters will describe each key and give you practical ways to weave faith nurture into your life together. The Four Keys will be woven through all subsequent chapters. The fifth chapter introduces the concept of AAA Christians.

These are the Christian disciples that all of our children need in their lives. They are *authentic*, *available*, and *affirming*. As a parent or faith parent, you are that AAA Christian, the one who develops a personal and trusted relationship with your child.

### SOME ASSUMPTIONS

You probably have already guessed that I am madly passionate about both families and faith nurture. I am a huge advocate of families as the classroom for teaching all that is most important, the crucible for refining the best in each of us, and a safe harbor from life's storms.

The foundational assumption of this book is that *parenting is inherently a profound and transforming spiritual journey for both parent and child*. Both parent and child are beloved children of God, loved and forgiven.

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Additional assumptions include:

- The sacred is woven into the fabric of the daily.
- Parents are the first face, voice, and hands of Jesus to their children. Children trust and love God because they have first experienced trust and love with their parents.
- In return, children enable adults to see and hear God, if they make time in their relationships with children to experience God's presence.
- No parent feels adequate or competent in this role or is even sure what it should look like. That is absolutely normal. Parents don't need to know all of the answers or feel comfortable embarking on this journey.
- Families come in all sizes, shapes, and descriptions.
- Good, healthy families go through difficult, painful, and sometimes terrifying times. So it is vitally important that they tell the truth, don't try to go it alone, and get the help they need, knowing that healing and reconciliation are
- God's gifts and that God is present in all of life.
- Faith is a living, breathing, changing thing. The spiritual journey and faith formation are lifelong. Faith will grow and be strengthened through your experiences with your children.
- Growing kids faithfully will take you a lifetime and always be in process, not always showing results on your schedule or coming with the assurance that there won't be problems.
- Growing kids faithfully does come with awe in receiving God's child (whether through birth, adoption, marriage, or foster care) and knowing that this child is entrusted to your care, to love and nurture all God created this child to be.

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