

Children learn what they live

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In 1959, Dorothy Law Nolte wrote a poem that many of us are familiar with: If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn. If children live with hostility, they learn to fight. If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy. If children live with shame, they learn to be guilty. If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive. If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

But, if children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient. If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence. If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate. If children live with fairness, they learn justice. If children live with security, they learn to have faith. If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves. If children live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to love the world.

What we say, what we praise, what we condemn, what we ignore, but even more the way we live exhibits our values. Others, and especially children listen to our every word, watch our every deed. A police officer pulled over a woman for speeding and asked to see her license. There was a long silence while she searched for it. Suddenly her son's little voice was heard from the backseat, "Mama, he doesn't look like a turkey to me."

Children hear everything we say. We are role models for them constantly. If we mutter racial slurs as we listen to the evening news, our child will form conclusions about people of other races.

Children are bright. If they sense that the Bible is not an important book in our life, chances are that it won't be in theirs. If they seldom see us pray, except maybe at meal-time, they will not take prayer seriously. If children sense that Sunday worship is a grim duty rather than a treasured privilege, they will stop attending as soon as they get a chance.

Two paddleboat steamers left Memphis heading down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, words were exchanged. Challenges were made. And the race began. As the boats roared down the Mississippi, one began falling behind. Not enough fuel. There had been plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat dropped back, an enterprising crew member took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the ovens. Their boat began to catch up, so they made fuel out of more and more cargo. They finally won the race, but in the process they burned the cargo they had been hired to transport. In the race, they lost sight of what was primary.

In our race, let us not lose sight of what is primary - to faithfully care for and be living examples for those persons entrusted to us, especially the children.
