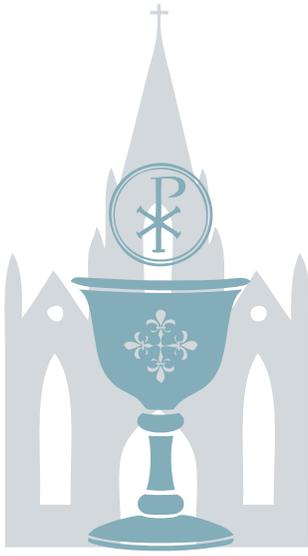


My Children Don't Practice the Faith! What Do I Do?

Advice from Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests For Life



Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Priests for Life Family,

So many of you, as you faithfully support our work, ask me and our team to pray for a relative -- perhaps one of your children or grandchildren -- who are away from the Church or not practicing their Faith. Because this is a concern of so many in our Priests for Life Family, I wanted to share the following thoughts as a way to encourage you and to assure you that we are praying every day for your family members who need to return to the Faith.

And we are praying for you!

*Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director*

When a loved one is away from the practice of the Faith, that is a source of deep concern and anguish, and it might last for a long time. We hope you will find it helpful to keep the following nuggets of advice in mind.

1. Don't blame yourself!

It is easy to feel guilty when someone close to you is away from the faith. Nagging thoughts go through our minds, like, "I must be a bad parent," "Why didn't I do more?," "It's all my fault."

Obviously, we all fall short in many ways. But that does not make it your fault that a son, daughter, or other family member is away from the Faith. After all, as much of an influence as you may be in their lives, there are many competing influences, and at various times in their lives, as hard as this is for us to accept, some of those other influences will be stronger than yours.

Remember, God is Almighty. Yet we walk away from him through sin. Jesus is Almighty. Yet some of his disciples broke away from him and one of the Twelve betrayed him. Does this mean Jesus did a poor job in forming them? Or is it simply because he gave them -- and he gave your children -- free will?

2. Trust the foundation

So many people have periods in their lives when, as a result of bad influences, or sinful habits of which they have not yet repented, or various kinds of immaturity or a desire to experience their own version of "independence," drift away from the Faith and/or the Church.

But so many of them also come back. Remember that no matter how far or how long they stray, they are still the children you raised, and you have put in place a foundation that stays with them. This foundation is deep, and though they may ignore it for years and years, it will be there when grace leads them to return. The foundation of faith, of love for the truth and of the moral law, may be obscured for a time, but it is not erased. It is always there, quietly calling them, subtly assuring them, and effectively receiving them back when they are ready.

3. Don't let the problem dominate your relationship

If you have a loved one away from the Faith, they already know your concern. What matters the most is not repeating your displeasure or the reasons for it. Rather, the greatest influence you continue to have is your relationship with that loved one. Keep it as strong and close as possible. Some people make the mistake of letting the fact that the loved one has strayed from the Church dominate the relationship. In other words, either they separate themselves from the loved one, or, every time they are together, they begin arguing about this point.

Don't let that happen! Don't feel you are morally obliged to speak up every time you are with them. Rather, continue to build positive experiences and memories together; talk about the things you agree on and enjoy the things you enjoy together. All this will build up trust in the person who is away, so that when they are ready to come back, they know they can come to you and find a loving welcome.

4. Keep the lines of communication open

Building on this recent point, be sure to keep up good communication with the loved one who is away from the Faith. Let them know what's going on in your life and ask about what's going on in theirs. Get together. Make sure they understand that despite whatever differences have arisen, they can always talk with you, bring you their questions, and find in you a calm, listening ear.

5. Give the example of holiness

To help a person return to the practice of the Faith, you need to make them want it. The best way to do this is to show them how it transforms you, how it makes you a loving, strong, kind, joyful and peaceful person. Show them the power of grace and the fruits of the Spirit in your life, which bring you joy even in the midst of sufferings and difficulties! Show them what they are missing out on when they are away from prayer and the sacraments. Then, your loved one will come to the conclusion, "I want what they've got!"

6. Trust God

A big part of dealing with this problem is to increase our trust in God. We may have been surprised when our loved one veered from the right path -- but remember, God saw it coming from all eternity, and he knows how to handle it. He is even more concerned about the problem than you or I are! Read the 38th chapter of the Book of Job to remind yourself that he sees and knows everything going on in the universe, and in the mind and heart of your loved one who is away. And God always cares for those he loves. We just have to trust him and do what is right.

7. Life events change people

Everything changes. And often, it is a change -- whether expected or unexpected -- in the life of your loved one that will jolt him or her back to a strong and vibrant faith. Look at the Gospel story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The son who was away thought he could "go it alone," until a famine broke out in the land. Then his mind went back to the foundation his father had laid, and he found a motive to return.

So many people after being away will come back when they experience some loss in their lives (health, money, position, relationships) or a new blessing (a new job, a child, a special milestone). Remember, things are always changing and always influencing your loved ones.

8. Remember Saint Monica

Because you are concerned about your loved one, you certainly pray for him or her each day. In this context, remember Saint Monica, who for so long prayed and wept because of her son, who was so far away from the Lord. Never doubt the

power of your prayers, no matter how long you don't see any results. Saint Monica's son became one of the greatest saints, bishops, and theologians of all time -- Saint Augustine!

9. We've got your back

Even we who are priests know that family members are the hardest ones to minister to -- and all of us have some who are away from the practice of the faith. We are all in this together, and therefore we have to rely on each other to reach our straying family members. I may not be the best one to bring back my relative who is away from the Faith -- who knows, maybe it will be something that you say or do that may lead them back -- and vice-versa.

Look at how many new initiatives are underway in the Church for "new evangelization" and new ways to reach those who are away. The use of media and modern social networking, for instance, is doing great things to invite people back to the Church. New associations, organizations, and ministries are rising up in the Church to help people take a new look at the Faith, and the influence of Pope Francis is helping very much in this. So have confidence, and turn to others to help reach out to those who need to be invited back!

10. If you didn't love them, it wouldn't hurt

Finally, amidst the anguish and pain of seeing a child or other relative away from the practice of the Faith, please find consolation in this: the reason it hurts so much is that you love them so much! And that makes you very pleasing to the Lord. That pain is there in your heart because you're sharing in the pain in the very heart of Christ, who wants all people to embrace him! If you were not already so faithful to the Lord, it wouldn't matter to you that someone is far from him. Let that faith, that love, sustain you each day!



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