

Child Dedication

About a year ago when I escorted Bimisola, my twelve year old daughter, to her new school, her teacher made very complementary statements about her performance. On my way back home, thinking about how well she and her fourteen year old brother, Bimisayo, were doing academically (both are honor students), I said aloud, "God's grace definitely has *something* to do with it." Immediately, I was corrected in my heart, 'It is **ALL** the grace of God!' I reflect over their lives, and I see God's hand on them at every point and in every aspect. Sometimes they do or say things that are not right or are about to form a bad habit; one way or the other, Dele, my husband and I get to know about it. As a result, we correct the wrong or nip the negative habit in the bud. Often, I joke with the children that we find them out because we know all things. On a serious note, I know that it is God who exposes their ways to us. That day as I reminisced, I glorified God that both children were healthy, well mannered and intelligent. Then I remembered this scripture about Jesus growing up strong, being filled with wisdom and having the grace of God upon him - **Luke 2:40**. It was a perfect fit for Bimisayo and Bimisola! I knew we had great kids and it was not because Dele and I were perfect parents. In my heart, I heard the Spirit of God saying to me, "This is what happens when you dedicate your child to God and have unfaltering trust in God to take care of the child."

Though dedicating a child to God leads to having God's blessings on the child, yet child dedication must be based on the foundation that you are in Christ. As a child of God who is committed to walking in the ways of God, you should expect to have children who will follow in your footsteps. When Dele and I were about to start a family, we yearned for children who will glorify God with their lives and accomplish mighty things for the kingdom of God because we were believers. In creation, God created vegetation and animals which produced offspring according to their kind - **Genesis 1:11-12; 20-25**. In creating Man, God did not deviate from this principle. **When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth - Genesis 5:1-3**. God's word further assures that a parent by the virtue of being a believer has holy children -

1Corinthians 7:14. As a righteous person (you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus - **1Corinthians 5:21**), you can expect God to make your children God-fearing. Note, this does not mean your children are born saved or have automatic salvation as a result: everyone must make a personal decision to be saved. When God enters into a covenant with an individual, it extends to his family. (Study **Genesis 13:14-15** about Abraham; **Genesis 26:1-6** about Isaac; and **Genesis 28:10-15** about Jacob, etc.) As long as your children are under your authority, your covenant of righteousness with God is broadened as a hedge over them. Dele and I dedicated our children to God because we knew that was the starting point in having God's will for their lives becoming fulfilled.

The steps in child dedication can be compared to the process of salvation. To get saved, you should understand that God's Word says that you are a sinner and you need to ask Jesus into your heart. Similarly, you should recognize that every child born into the world is born as a sinner. David said, **'In sin did my mother conceive me' - Psalm 51:5**. Just knowing that you are a sinner and you need Jesus does not make you saved. You need to believe with your heart and confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus - **Romans 10:9-10**. Like salvation, comprehending all the things outlined above does not ensure automatic dedication of your child to God. Dele and I learnt that godly children will not just materialize simply because we craved for them. We realized that God was the one who could mold their character and charter a righteous future for them; and we needed to make a conscious request to God about it. So, together in the privacy of the hospital room at the birth of each child, we laid our hands on the child and said a prayer that went like this, "Dear Father God, we dedicate this child unto you, in Jesus Name. We ask and receive the grace to bring up this child in your ways and for your glory, in Jesus Name, Amen." The act of dedicating your child to God involves you believing in your heart that God is able to keep that which is entrusted to him and saying with your mouth (in your own words) a prayer of dedication of your child to God. The prayer may be as simple or as elaborate as you please; the important thing is that you say it in faith.

You ask, what about the dedication service in church? I would liken that to the act of water baptism after salvation. With or without it, your faith in Christ is

what brings about your salvation. Water baptism is commanded by God - **Matthew 28:19**. Jesus told John to baptize him to fulfill all righteousness - **Matthew 3:15**. A child dedication ceremony is a forum to publicly present your child to God and have other believers join their faith with yours for your child's godly future. It is also an acknowledgement that the church represents the larger family within which the child will be raised up. Approximately six weeks after birth, we carried Bimisayo to church for a child dedication service. When it came to that portion of the service, our pastor gave a short exaltation on the importance of child dedication to God. He asked Dele and me if we were ready to raise up our son in the ways of God. Of course, we said yes. He proceeded to invoke God's blessing over the life of our child in dedicating him to God. Our pastor also petitioned God's grace for us to bring up Bimisayo in the ways of God. Nearly two years later, we went through a similar ceremony for Bimisola.

The timing of child dedication differs from family to family for many reasons. It is, however, best to dedicate your child right at birth. For some, it does not occur to them to do so until the child dedication service. Yet still, for others it has not even occurred to them to do so until reading this. Correspondingly, the time allotment for a child dedication ceremony varies. In the bible, Jesus was presented in the temple when the time of Joseph and Mary's purification according the Law of Moses had been completed - **Luke 2:22**. Church traditions may prevail. For us, the church we attended encouraged child dedication on the first Sunday the child was brought to church. In some churches, there may be set times in the month or year assigned for child dedication. Also, the date as to when all family members can attend may be taken into consideration. As long as your child is still under your parental authority, it is never too late. In our first church, a newly saved mother brought her three teenage children and had them dedicated to God before the congregation. God honored her faith. Months later, she testified about the positive changes she had begun to observe in all her children. Whatever the time, the crucial aspect is that you understood the reasons for dedicating your child to God and then proceeding in faith.

After dedicating your child to God, with or without a child dedication service, you can expect the Lord's blessings upon the child. In asking the Lord for

a child, Hannah vowed to give the child back to the Lord. Six years later, after she had weaned Samuel, the child God gave her, she fulfilled her vow by entrusting Samuel under the care of Eli the priest. The result of dedicating her child to the Lord was that ***the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men - 1Samuel 2:26***. In the New Testament, ***Joseph and Mary took him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord... the child [Jesus] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him - Luke 2:22-23, 39-40***. I remember an occasion where Bimisayo, almost two years old, went missing after church. He apparently walked out of the church premises unnoticed with the departing crowd after the first service. As soon as we realized he was missing, a search party was convened. As I combed the area for him with the sister I was paired with, I kept re-assuring myself that we had dedicated him to God and wherever he was, God's protection was over him. Armed with this fact, I was convinced that we would find him sooner or later and my heart was at peace. About two hours later, the sister and I came across him in a neighboring catholic children's church. He had been fed and was fast asleep. Each time I think about the incidence, I am further convinced that one of the benefits of dedicating your child to God is the promise of God's protection.

You may question, I dedicated my child to the Lord but why don't I see any of these blessings in his/her life? Dedicating your child as I mentioned earlier should be established on God's Word and done in faith. Also, what you are committing to, by dedicating your child, is the continuous surrender of the child to God with steady trust in God for the life of the child. The act of dedicating your child to God does not stand alone; it is synonymous with an unceasing trust in God over the child's life. God has a plan for your child which He is able to carry out and you need to trust Him to do so. Hannah said, ***'I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him over to the LORD...'*** - ***1Samuel 1:27-28***. It was well known that Eli's sons were wicked men and this was the household Hannah chose to leave her son to grow up in. Despite the corruption in Eli's house, she was able to declare, ***'...For his whole life he will be given to the LORD'*** - ***1 Samuel 1:28***. Her dedication of her son to the LORD was complete. Samuel turned out to be a great prophet, ***the LORD was with Samuel as***

he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground - 1Samuel 3:19. With our children, Dele and I regularly yield them over to the Lord to have his way in their lives and pronounce God's blessings over their lives. Last year, our son went through a stage in his life where he had questions about his faith. Though he participated in our daily family devotion, went to church and even took active part in the youth ministry when available, yet he did not seem to have a personal fellowship with God. I must confess that sometimes it bothered me. At such times, I learned to pray for him and re-affirmed my faith in God for his life. God was faithful. I am certain that because we dedicated him to God, he was God's and God was in control of his life. Sooner or later, I believed, the work of the Holy Spirit in his life would produce great spiritual results. To the glory of God, towards the end of last year, our son re-dedicated his life to Christ and was water baptized. God is working out His plan in his life. Indeed, our God is faithful.

Dedicating your child to God has many advantages connected to it with the assurance of a godly future for the child. In the bible, Samuel and Jesus are examples for us to hold on to. Dele and I bear witness to the power and grace of God on Bimisayo and Bimisola as a result of dedicating them to the Lord. I have met several Christians who have testified to the same about their children. It is my hope that you will realize the blessings attached to child dedication and appropriate such over your children.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved,