

TOP TIPS

For Engaging Boys in Church



1 Model faith, don't just preach!

Model a strong faith, don't just preach it. As you model it, you help boys feel their faith at an individual level, not merely an institutional one. As we model following Jesus experientially, boys grow toward Jesus with you. Just "preaching" faith will drive boys away from faith.

2 Practice a Faith that is Flexible

In a world of connection, complexity, and diversity, boys need to be confident that their church community can provide thoughtful, reasoned answers to complicated issues instead of canned, one-sentence answers.

3 Enjoy an Interactive Faith with Boys

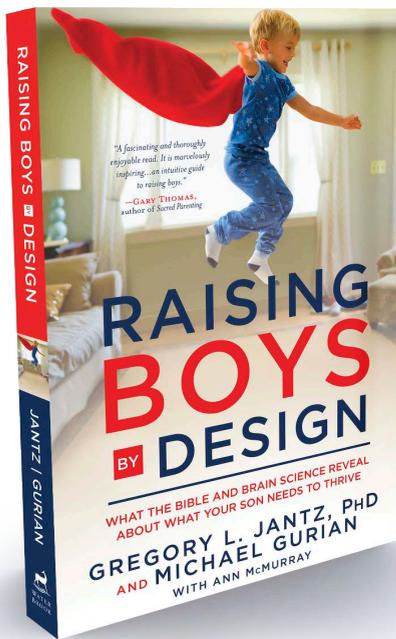
Help boys to do more, say more, lead more, and be more in church. Ask boys to talk about their lives, their work, their interests in church school and church services. Bring interactive technologies and situations into church as it is possible. Boys trust what is interactive.

4 Make Sure Your Faith Stays Relevant

Faith needs to translate into the "real" world of careers and relationships. Keep connecting your faith to that real world until you are confident that your sons know that God cares about all aspects of a person's life, including what we do for a living. Like a spring, faith should bubble up, over, and around, saturating all areas of family, community, career, and life.

5 Keep Faith Robust and Muscular

Sunday school can become something kids find insipid. To avoid this, add more debates, more muscularity to it. Think of Jacob wrestling with the angel. We don't need to throw each student's hip out of joint, but we do need to create some meetings in which a boy feels somewhat "bruised" (thus, challenged and blessed) by those who cared enough to tell the truth and challenge the boy to become a man.



6 Keep a Faith That Includes Room for Questions

Boys can go deeper with God if they ask questions. Tell boys stories of the questions you've asked, and answers you've received. Invite any and all questions. As boys question you and God, help them find the answers they need.

7 Remember, Faith Is Strong Enough to Include Doubt

As our sons wrestle with the questions that arise from navigating life in this world, doubt will be their companion at some point. Because each boy is a unique soul, each will entertain his doubts differently, but we would be foolish to think those doubts don't exist. Help boys identify and work through their doubts by listening and then sharing your own doubts. Amazing bonding and growth can happen through this process of expressing doubt and building faith together.

When Faith is Taught in a Classroom, Make that Classroom Active.

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In some ways, churches have become as unfriendly to males as classrooms--another sit-down, shut-up, don't-move experience, one boys are only too glad to be done with. Boys need to engage in faith, move around, throw things, be kinesthetic, engage in play and in debates, receive lectures while walking together or out in nature. If the classroom of faith does not stay physically and mentally active, it becomes for boys a lifeless ritual, one quickly exchanged for the greater exhilaration of any number of activities and video games.

Make Faith Intergenerational, and Men-Inclusive

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When spiritual conversations and activities take place in a multigenerational setting, boys receive much-needed mentoring and apprenticeship from elders of both sexes. And when elder men help kindle or feed the fire of faith in boys, boys will more likely become and remain men of faith. Intergenerational faith life is essential to a boy's growth into a man of faith; elder male influence is also essential. As we work through the roles we want women and men to play in church, we have an opportunity to make sure men feel vital in church, and one way to do that is to make sure to connect them with the mentoring of one or more boys in the church.

Make Sure Boys Know that Faith Costs Something

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Active faith costs something, and that's what gives it value. Active faith requires time, energy, commitment, sacrifice. Boys want and need a sacred mission in this world. If faith is ever to compete with the manufactured grandiosity of video games, it is important that we highlight our commitment to Christ as a risky, costly, valuable, cosmic adventure designed to save the world.