

Parenting in the Land of Plenty
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I remember going to a school Halloween carnival when I was a kid. I think it was during my elementary days – and the carnival was school sponsored. I remember walking through this hallway and seeing all of these scary characters behind bars yelling and screaming at me. They were acting as though those bars were the only things holding them back from having their way with me. I remember being terrified, completely TERRIFIED! As the father of two wonderful girls and the addition of a little boy only about a month away, I feel as though I am walking that gauntlet again... only this time the people behind the bars aren't so ugly.

My oldest daughter is in her second year of school and it has been an adventure to say the least. As I read all of the research that states between 70% and 80% (depending on who you are reading) of children who grow up in the church are leaving it at the beginning of their college career, I become extremely frightened. Further, to read that only 10% of young people who claim to be committed followers of Jesus have a true biblical worldview, my heart seems to plummet in the overwhelming odds.

I find myself bearing the weight of this issue for two reasons. First, I am a father and have the opportunity to impact generations to come through the blessing of having children. Second, I am a pastor and have been called by God to lead other families to embrace the biblical picture of the home. To say that I am inadequate for the first would be an understatement but to say I am merely inadequate in regards to the second would be a gross misrepresentation. I might simply look at the church and what it has done and replicate it as the solution to our problems. However, it seems that this strategy has fallen incredibly short according to all of the ink that has already been given to this discussion. On the other hand it would be entirely too deconstructive to not learn from the history of the church. This leaves me with the option of looking directly at the Bible and not forcing the presuppositions of what goes on in the broader church over it.

There are two primary biblical texts that direct us in this journey. Moses writes in Deuteronomy 6, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."* Next to this text we have Paul's words in his letter to the church of Ephesus, *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* There are so many other texts we could peruse yet the truths all ring the same.

It does not take any specialized training to realize that God has explicitly given the role of teaching children about the Lord to parents – and even more specifically to fathers. So, this part of the issue is easy I suppose – from an intellectual standpoint. I, with my wife's help, am responsible for teaching my children about Jesus. Ultimately God will hold me, as the father, responsible and not any church or ministry. So what is the role of the church in

regards to children? The role of the church is to partner with parents through equipping them to embrace their role as shepherd and teacher within their home.

As the pastor of a church plant this has been a very difficult issue for me. Why? Well, I believe God called me to plant a church so that people would embrace the life-changing story of Jesus. I know that in the land of plenty known as Katy, one of the easiest ways to gather a large group of people would be to create the biggest, badest, bodacious list of children's activities ever seen. Flash and bang is what attracts many folks here in the land of plenty. However, that is not the way in which God has called our community of faith to see homes transformed.

Although we do have age divided teaching during our worship hour for our infant through preschool ages, my daughter who is in first grade arrives at church each Sunday and sits with her mom taking notes while I preach (and she is not the only one). Hard to believe I know... it has been for me as well. At the end of the sermon they gather for a short small group time to talk through the notes that they took on the listening guide provided. I have been completely floored at the amount of material my 6 year old daughter retains from a sermon on the book of Acts or Jonah. She has begun using words that I have never heard her use before – and she knows what they mean! This has offered our family a shared experience through which we can have a continuing dialogue all week long.

God amazed me through this but He did not stop there. We have been making available a resource for the past several months called Family Times Packs. These packs are structured around the Deuteronomy 6 model. We have a resource to use when they wake up, go to bed, eat meals, and go along their way (CD for the car). I have begun using this resource most mornings before she departs for school. My desire is to give her the feeling of having a spiritual time at the start of each day. Well, recently she waltzed out the door with her backpack strapped on – so big that it looks like a backpack with legs rather than my daughter – and headed to our van for her ride to school. My wife arrived back home and told me about her car pool buddy telling my daughter about a bully that had been giving him trouble. My daughter replied, "My daddy read me a story this morning that could help you with that." We had read the story in Acts of how Barnabas had to convince the leaders of the church to show Paul kindness even though he had such a tainted past.

Oh me of little faith! God desires for parents to be the ones that teach their children about the scriptures and it actually works. I know this is only step one – a baby step one – in my parenting journey. However, this baby step is transforming and I cannot wait to see God's ripples of transformation pouring through the homes of our community. Parenting in the land of plenty is no easy task. There are so many opportunities to fill our children's minds with influencers. We can easily expose them to the influence of a piano teacher, soccer coach, tae kwon do instructor, ballet teacher, and/or Sunday school teacher. None of those are negative unless they overshadow, or even worse, take the place of us as parents embracing our role as the primary influencers and faith trainers in our children's lives. The land of plenty begs for busyness while the gospel demands simplicity. The land of plenty strives for abundance while the gospel demands relationships. I do not have all of the answers but I am willing to do absolutely anything to accomplish the goal.