

Discipleship Begins at Home
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We're in a war. I'm not talking about the war on terrorism. The war I'm talking about is the all-out assault on the family. Today's children are being attacked like no other generation in history. What's different? This is the first generation in America to be saturated with antichristian media messages.

In my lifetime, American has moved from being a nation based on Christian principles to being a post-Christian culture. When I was in elementary school, not only did we say the Pledge of Allegiance every day, but we had daily Bible reading and prayer! Now, we are post-Christian, which means our nation has lost the primacy of the Christian worldview and has replaced it with a secular worldview. The word secular means worldly and disconnected from religion.

And we are quickly moving from a post-Christian culture to an anti-Christian culture. In that culture – Christianity will not be tolerated. In fact, Christians will be hated. We will be considered outdated, irrelevant, hateful and mean because of our biblical stance about sin.

Our children are growing up in this culture and they are constantly hearing unbiblical, anti-Christian messages on TV, on the internet, on social media, in music, in school, in their friendships. The god of this world is relentlessly using the ways of this world to disciple children in the deceptions of the world!

And the result is sad and scary:

My parent's generation – the WW2 generation – is 65% Christian.

My generation – the baby boomers – is 35% Christian.

My children's generation – Generation X – is 16% Christian.

Get ready: This current generation is on track to be only 4% Christian!

And the younger generation has by far the highest rate of depression, suicide, hopelessness and identity issues. A generation is under attack and unless we change what we're doing – we can lose and many of them.

But here's an encouraging word – when parents are godly examples and when they stay engaged with their children and dependent on the power of the Lord - they are the greatest force for good in their child's life. And here's an encouraging promise from Proverbs 22:6 –

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Training a child means to disciple our children.

So, I'm preaching a message today entitled Discipleship Begins at Home.

What does it mean to train children in the way they should go? Some scholars believe it means we teach children the proper way to live. I agree with that. We teach morals, values and principles that guide children in the way God wants them to go in life.

But I also agree with those who say this means that we should train our children according to their individual personality, temperament, or gift. This is how the Amplified Bible translates Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go (in keeping with his individual gift, talents or abilities), and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Parents make a big mistake when they think they can raise each child the same. Yes, we teach the same values and morals to each of them. But they are each different – they learn differently and they respond to different discipline. So, don't ask a child, "Why aren't you more like your brother?" Because the answer is, "God made us all different." Psalm 139:13 says:

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.

We were all shaped by God differently. If you want to train your children in the way they should go – you must know their spiritual gifts, aptitudes, abilities and personality. Knowing this will help you disciple them according to their destiny.

By the way, one of the obstacles that can get in the way of our children is our own desires for them. You should raise your children in the way they should go – that's the way God wants them to go – not necessarily in the way you want them to go.

Many children have felt pressured to follow in their parent's footsteps – To be in the military like their father - To be a teacher like their mother - To take over the family business - To pastor their father's church - But that's not necessarily the way they should go!

I think back to our kids growing up. Deb and I are both big on education. We took our children's education very seriously. We home schooled them for many years. We modeled education by getting college degrees. We expected our kids to go to college, but neither one of them had the slightest desire to. That was very disappointing to us because we had seen statistics that show the more education you have the more money you can make in life. We thought that without an education our children would never amount to much.

But guess what? They both became remarkably successful at what they do and they both make a lot more money than we do! We learned that the way our children should go is not always the way we think they should go. We also learned that just because they do it differently does not mean they are doomed to failure!

Please – don't force your child into a mold that does not fit them! You might become the obstacle that is holding them back.

Our series on discipleship is based on the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations. But Jesus also gave a strategy to His disciples in Acts 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In other words, you don't start with the ends of the earth! In order to obey Christ and make disciples of all nations, we have to start in our own homes. Before you disciple the nations, you must disciple your own children.

Parents, not the Church, are primarily responsible for discipling their children. The church has a vital role, but we only have the opportunity to disciple your children an hour a week. The rest of the time the opportunity is yours!

God made this priority incredibly clear thousands of years ago. In Deuteronomy 6:5 God what Jesus called the Greatest Commandment.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Then – immediately after that – verses 6-7 say:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Teach them diligently to your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you go to bed at night.

God is saying several things here. First – loving God is our first priority. Our second priority is to teach our children to love God. Thirdly - God says that discipling children is a 24/7 responsibility.

A parents job of teaching their child to love God never stops. Parents are called to spend 24 hours a day, 7 days a week modeling and instructing their children in what it looks like to follow God. Discipleship begins at home!

Parents – listen closely – we must be serious about being disciples if we are going to be able to disciple our children. You need to get all the help you can on how to disciple children.

We have purchased a great tool to help you called Right Now Media. Right Now Media is like the Netflix of Bible study. It has video Bible studies on every book of the Bible and almost any topic you can think of. There's also thousands of awesome children's programs.

I did a search for parenting and there are dozens of videos to help you. I also searched family devotions and there are many of those also. All you need to do is text grace to 49775 to access this free library.

By the way – when it comes to family discipleship, husbands and wives have a role in discipling each other. We each have strengths and weaknesses and our strengths can help our partner overcome their weaknesses.

Here’s a couple of Scriptures about couples discipling each other. If our spouse is not walking with God – we have a role in reaching them. 1 Peter 3:1-2 says:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Don’t be frightened by the word submit. It’s not talking about blind obedience. It means to give up trying to control. By the way – Ephesians 5:21 tells us to

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So we need to practice mutual respect and submission in marriage. The point of the 1 Peter passage is that we cannot control our spouses and try to coerce or nag them into the kingdom of God. It is our godly example that will ultimately reach them. Then, Ephesians 5:25-26 says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, washed by the cleansing of God’s word.

Again, I believe both spouses can do this. We should wash each other with the word. This does not mean to beat them up with the word or berate them with the word or shame them with the word. It means to speak the word of God to them and pray the word for them. It means to help cleanse their minds of wrong thinking, condemnation, or shame and building them up with the truth of God’s word.

Parents, we should make sure we are true disciples and we should be discipling each other so that we can truly disciple our children together. Ephesians 6:4 says:

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

By the way, this is true for mothers too. Neither parent should exasperate their children. Both parents should disciple their children in the truths of God’s word.

What does it mean to “exasperate your children”? It means we must not use inappropriate words or actions to provoke your children towards anger, so that

resentment grows in their hearts. We exasperate our children when we:
 are easily angered - speak carelessly - are unreasonable
 are unwilling to listen - fail to keep our word
 say one thing and do another - play favorites - are inconsistent

Instead of exasperating our children, we must raise them according to God's truth through a positive relationship.

What does raising our children in the instruction of the Lord look like? What does it require?

First, intentionality.

You must be intentional. Some parents pride themselves in always being open and available to their kids to talk, but they are never proactive in talking to them. Being available is great – but being intentional is even greater! It's great to be open and available rather than closed and unavailable, but teenagers especially don't tend to be all that open about talking to you. To disciple your children you have to put forth the effort.

Second, sacrifice of time.

We have a plague in America. It's called Busyness. Sports and school activities, and for some of us church activities. We are so busy doing doing, that we miss out on true discipleship.

If your children want to play sports or do scouts or be a part of the choir or band or whatever—great. You should be involved in that as a family. But if all you ever do is run your scouts between basketball practice and band practice, then you need to rethink your priorities. Maybe it means your children don't get to do everything they want to do—so be it. You need to learn the power of a little word called NO! I love you, but no.

Your main job is to raise your children in the faith! Yes, we want them to be productive and educated and earn a decent living. But what if they gain the whole world and lose their soul? 3 John 4 says:

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

That is our goal as parents: that our children will know God, love God and walk in truth.

Are you making the most of your time with your children? Life is but a vapor, time is precious, don't waste it, but instead make sacrificial efforts to spend time with your spouse and children. Turn the TV off and spend some time together as a family. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that by the time American children are 6 years old, they have spent more time watching TV than they will spend talking to their dad over their entire lifetime. Do you find things you like to do together?

To do that means you have to enter into each other's worlds and do things that are fun for them, not just for you.

To relate to your children you need to know their love language and you need to enter their world. You need to know your spouses love language as well as your kids. Dr. Gary Chapman has written books for each of these relationships.

If you are doing your best to love a family member and they don't feel loved – chances are you need to learn their love language. If your love language is gifts and a family member's is quality time, you can give them gifts all day because that's your love language, but you're not speaking their language and they won't feel loved.

I want to encourage you to follow up on this. I encourage you to read the books, but if that's too much, google 5 loves languages and look at the videos tab, you will find one by Dr. Chapman. He also has videos for love languages for children and teens.

You need to learn your kid's love language and you need to learn how to enter their world. That means to learn what they enjoy doing and enter into that with them whether you enjoy it or not! Do it for them. My Son – fishing/hunting My Daughter – play games / collected things like stamps

Invest time in your children. The more time you spend together, the more you can influence them. Be intentional and sacrifice your time for your family.

Third, prayer.

Pray for your spouse, pray for your kids...and, pray *with* them! What better way to teach your children how to pray than to pray with them? Pray at the dinner table. Say a prayer with them before you send them off to school. Say a prayer with them after they return and you ask them about their day. Say a prayer with them before bed...before you go to church...before you go on a trip...before they go out with their friends.

These prayers don't have to be an hour long - they can be quick prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for safety and wisdom. And really, isn't that a practical part of pray without ceasing?

Fourth, Bible devotion.

Spend time each day as a family where you sit down and read the Bible together. Rotate each day who reads, and then spend a few moments talking about what it means. These don't have to all be deep exegetical studies about the use of the word "holy" in Leviticus either. Just read a passage or a chapter, and ask some questions like: What does this say about God? His nature? His character? What does this say to us?

Finally, worship.

Yes, Bible study and prayers are a part of worship, but what are some other things you can do? You can sing hymns and praise songs. You or your children can share poems about God they have written. You can talk about giving to missions or Angel Tree. But worship together as a family as well.

Parents, I want to give you some relief today: you don't have to be perfect. We've all blown it with our children. I've blown it. There are no perfect parents. Sometimes we do it right, sometimes we don't. Even so – our sons and daughters know if we really love them. When they know that, even they don't expect us to be perfect. This is no excuse to be a bad, lazy, selfish parent. We need to get it right more than we get it wrong. I just want to encourage you that you don't have to be perfect to be a good parent. Just fight for your family by showing them you care!

Parents, you have what it takes to disciple your children! You have the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

And since it's Father's Day, I want to say this to men:
 Your family needs you man of God!
 They need you to be a man of faith and a man of the Word!
 They need to hear you speak the Word of God!
 They need to lay hands on them when they are sick so they are healed.
 They need you doing spiritual warfare on their behalf!
 They need to see you standing in faith when times are tough!
 They need to see that going to church is a priority for you!
 They need to see you worshipping God with abandonment – not holding back because of embarrassment!
 They need to see you tithing and giving and sowing seed!
 They need to see you praying when they have a need!
 They need to see you living your faith every day!

For us to disciple our children – we need the power of God! We need God training us how to train our children. We need God leading us so we can lead our children. Human effort is not enough to win this battle! This is why Psalm 127:1 says:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

Yes, parents have the responsibility to build their families – but their first responsibility is to be sure that God is building. Yes, parents have the responsibility to watch over their children – but their first responsibility is to be sure God is watching over their children! Without that – all we do is in vain. We must have the power of God - the wisdom of God – the blessing of God – and the presence of God in our families. That enables us to disciple our children for the glory of God because discipleship begins in the home!