

Features

Helping Parents Lead Their Children BIBLICALLY

BY BRIAN HAYNES



Using Deuteronomy 6 as a guide

Deuteronomy 6 has been getting a lot of attention lately in the church leadership world,

particularly verses 6 and 7. *“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.”*

Churches everywhere are evaluating their current discipleship practices in light of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Recent research provided by Christian Smith, Walt Mueller and George Barna suggest the event-driven ministries of the last 30 years do not produce Christians living according to a biblical worldview. The cold hard facts are forcing us to think about the importance of the family as the primary vehicle of biblical discipleship.

Some have been daring enough to call this another trend in the strategic realm of western ecclesiology. I, on the other hand, see this as a massive recall and a move of the Lord. God is speaking to the overseers of His church and leading them to rediscover the ancient path of spiritual formation as described in Deuteronomy 6. Recently Darren Whitehead of Willow Creek Community Church described his church's process of internal evaluation in light of the scriptures. Humbly, the church concluded, according to scripture, that the family is plan A and the church is plan B when it comes to the spiritual formation of the next generation.

Several years ago my church (Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy, Texas) reached the same conclusion. The hypothesis was convicting and exciting all at once. We experienced conviction, because we realized we had been leaving parents out of the discipleship equation. We became excited, because we entered a new dimension and a new way of thinking about ministry. We made a shift from the compartmentalized status quo of “church alone discipleship” to the ancient path linking church and family to equip the generations. We decided to equip parents to be the primary faith influencers of their children every day. What can professionals and volunteers in children's ministry do to help parents live out the pattern of Deuteronomy 6? Let me suggest three things that any children's minister can and should do to empower parents to lead their children spiritually.

1) Dream of ways to encourage parents to understand and embrace their role as primary faith influencer.

Many parents believe that bringing their children to church fulfills their duty as spiritual trainers of their children. We need to help parents understand their roles. The Bible commands parents to teach their children the truth of God's Word diligently in the natural, mundane rhythm of every day life.

Understanding the role of parents as the primary faith trainers is not enough. Even if parents acknowledge their biblical role, they typically do not know how to lead their children spiritually. Knowing is one thing, but embracing the role is another. Children's ministers can encourage parents by giving them easy wins. For instance, we lead parents to help their children memorize scripture. We give them an easy win by offering catalytic tools that help parents memorize scripture with their children. We offer parents a kids' “Foundations Verse Pack” from Desiring God ministries. The pack consists of small flash cards that can be used as part of a regular bedtime routine (*when you lie down*) with children. We also point parents to music from Seeds Family Worship. The guys and gals from Seeds put scripture to some of the best music for kids I have heard. We tell parents to pop the CDs in as they drive (*when you walk by the way*) to soccer practice, church, school, or wherever. Kids learn the scripture by singing songs and it's an easy win for Mom or Dad.

Children's pastors become cheerleaders, equippers and resourcers for parents who are struggling to lead their children in a biblical way. You have to become a consistent source of help and encouragement, constantly dreaming of ways to give Mom and Dad a win as primary faith influencers.

2) Teach parents to lead intentional faith talks.

As a children's minister you have the unique opportunity to help parents become intentional about faith training. We need to teach every parent to lead a faith talk at least one time per week. I define faith talk as intentional time set aside each week for conversation around the scripture. (When you sit in your house) ►►



Parents need a formal platform from which to teach their children the Bible. Faith talk is that platform. Most parents outsource their platform to the church. In a Deuteronomy 6 model, though, parents become the first voice teaching the scriptures in a child's life.

Many obstacles stand between parents and the actual practice of faith talk. Busyness, feelings of inadequacy, fear of not knowing the scripture, and lack of discipline top the chart. As a children's minister you can equip and empower parents to overcome these obstacles. Ask your pastor to preach on the importance of the family faith talk using Deuteronomy 6 as his text. Lead a seminar for parents called "How to Lead Faith Talks." Help parents set aside one night a week as family night. If you can, give families Sunday evening back by reducing your programming at church. Then encourage parents to use Sunday afternoon and evening as family time and faith talk time.

Point parents to age-appropriate resources that help them lead effective faith talks. We have three elementary age children in our home. Some of our favorite tools for faith talks have been the *Family Night Tool Chest* series put out by Heritage Builders and all of the *Family Time Training* resources by Kirk Weaver.

If you have creative people in your church, consider putting together a volunteer team to write a weekly faith talk idea for parents. You can post the weekly ideas to your website, blog, or hand them out in adult Sunday school classes or small groups that are full of parents.

Finally, consider asking your pastor to write an entry-level faith talk of sorts based on his weekly sermon. My pastor writes a weekly faith talk called "Table Talk." If a person comes to worship and hears the message he is then prepared to lead a short faith talk based on the sermon topic. Our "Table Talk" is as short as three questions to ask your children after reading the passage of the day. This is an easy win and a beginning point for parents.

3) Help parents capture God sightings

God sightings are those God-orchestrated moments that happen in life as we *walk by the way*. The parental art of capitalizing on a God moment is fundamental to leading children spiritually. We all have God sightings. Often the circumstances of life give us opportunities to grow spiritually. As children's ministers it is important to help parents recognize these moments and use them to teach their children biblically.

Several weeks ago a parent in our church relayed a God sighting with her daughter. This fifth grader was disappointed with the teacher she had been assigned to for the new school year. She was also disappointed that her BFFs were not in her class either. Mom suggested that they sit down together and pray about this before school started. The daughter said that she honestly did not think it would help since God had not answered her original prayer and given her the teacher she wanted in a class with the friends that she wanted. Mom used that time to talk about how God does not always give us exactly what we think we want, but He does always give us good things. They talked about the scripture that says, "God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called for His purpose." They agreed together to trust God in this situation. The first day of school came and went. When the mom asked her daughter if everything was working out, she said that her new teacher was great and she was enjoying some new friends. They prayed and thanked God together. This parent did a great job speaking truth into the situation.

As a children's ministry leader you can make a significant impact on a child's spiritual development by investing in their parents. Help parents become the primary faith influencer in their child's life. Help parents lead intentional faith talks and help them capture the God moments. When you do these things you are walking the ancient path of Deuteronomy 6 in your ministry practice. ❖

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