

Transforming our children into spiritual champions

By Neil Smith, at King of Kings, 21 May 2023, 8am & 10am Services.

Danielle - USA (10am Service)

Introduction

Today is our final message in our build to last series. This morning I want to talk about; 'Transforming our children into spiritual champions.'

I received an invitation a few weeks ago, with my name on, it but it was obviously a mistake. They either had the wrong guy, or there was a major mix-up, because it was a invitation to a 25 year High School Reunion.

When I opened it up, I was shocked to realised that there was no mistake. It was for me! I can't believe its been so long.

So, after I calmed down a bit, I started to think back to that time. The good old days! Have you ever heard people say that they want to go back to the "good old days?" Have you ever said it yourself? I know some of you need to go back far further than 25 years? (Smile)

Some of us are now vintage models. The grey is flourishing. And the world is a very different place. Some of you were around in the 50's, some in the 60's. Yesterday I was playing hockey in Belville, and one of my teammates said it was a field he played grand challenge on in 1974. We had a good laugh, because I told him that I was not even born yet.

And how the world has changed. Yet, it is this 'very different' world that our children are having to grow up in.

Sometimes, we think that if we could just turn back the clock, then parenting would be easier. If we could just go back to, the "good old days," then things would be better. So let's quickly deal with that, shall we? Let's go all the way back to the beginning, the book of Genesis, and focus on the families there.

In the first marriage relationship, Adam blamed his wife for his behaviour, and when speaking to God, referred to her, as; "this woman you gave me!" Their children were not getting along, but it was far worse than just a brotherly squabble, Cain ended up killing his brother Abel.

Noah got severely drunk, and naked, his son dishonours him, and then Noah curses that son.

Abraham lies twice, pretending that Sarah was his sister, and not his wife, just because he feared people would kill him to take her.

A father named Isaac, loved his one son Esau; while the mother Rebekah, favoured the other son, Jacob.

When Jacob becomes a father, he favours Joseph, and Joseph's brothers all want to kill him!

And that's just to mention a few of the families in Genesis. Anyone here feel better about their own family now? Good.

Because I want you to know that this is not a place for "together" people, and 'perfect' families, because we're all in process here. My family is not perfect, and neither is yours.

Because of sin, there really has never been a time that we could call "the good old days." But God works through all of this, and has provided principles and practices in His Word to equip parents for the task of raising spiritual champions.

Before we go any further this morning, I want to give a "shout-out" to those of you who are raising young children right now. Some of you are battling bedtimes and wondering when all the whining is going to stop. You're juggling schedules and running on emotional "empty."

I want to encourage you to take a deep breath this morning, and listen to these comforting words from the Lord in Isaiah;

"He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." (Isaiah 40:11)

I love that picture – Jesus gently leading those of you, with little lambs in your home - I think we can all receive that. We all need Jesus to gently lead us. Amen?

So, like I said, today I want to speak to you about 'Transforming our children into spiritual champions.'

I can't think of anything more rewarding for a Christian parent to know, that a child has taken the "belief baton" and is now running the race of faith by themselves. The Christian parents I know long for their kids to not only become Christians, but to live out their faith on a daily basis.

We see this yearning in the Apostle Paul when he writes;

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you." (Galatians 4:19-20, ESV)

Paul is concerned and perplexed because his spiritual children are being led astray. Like many of us parents, he is in pain for them, because he wants Christ to be formed in their lives.

On a regular basis, I've talked to parents who have expressed great concern about their children. They desperately want their kids to become devoted disciples but they're worried because they're not sure which way they're going to go.

George Barna is a big researcher, and he has discovered three different parenting models:

Parenting by default. This is when we just do what we think we should do without even thinking about it.

Experimental parenting. This is when we try different things depending on what we read or hear.

Revolutionary parenting. The goal of this type of parenting, is to raise children who make their faith in God and their relationship with Him their highest priority in life.

Barna discovered that for revolutionary parents;

“Parenting is their full-time job; the job they get paid to do is simply an addendum to the most important work they will do in life” (“Revolutionary Parenting,” page xiv).

I want to be a revolutionary parent, and I want you to be revolutionary parents. But I know its not for the faint of heart.

According to Dr. James Dobson, 80% of parents feel like they're failures! This “crisis of confidence” is affecting families all around the world. While parenting is demanding, too many of us find the task burdensome.

Parents today have saddled themselves with unnecessary guilt, fear, and self-doubt.

I know parenting is hard work, but its important heart work.

The bible says in Proverbs 22, verse 6;

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6)

Parenting is not only hard work; it is heart work.

Barna has also emphasised the importance of the 5-12 year old age group, in shaping how people turn out as adults. Listen to what he says;

“If you want to shape a person’s life – whether you are concerned about his or her moral, spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional or economic development – it is during these crucial eight years (between 5-12 years old) that lifelong habits, value, beliefs and attitudes are formed.” (Barna Research)

Parents. The early bird catches the worm. Children absorb values as early as two years of age. A child's moral development is usually set by the age of 9. That means you have to start early!

This is part of the reason why we as a church leadership believe that children's ministry is so crucial, so important, and such a priority to us. Consider the facts. People are much more likely to accept Christ as their Saviour when they are young. Falling in love with Jesus and his Word, and his church, typically peaks before they become teenagers. This faith develops while we are young and changes surprisingly little after that. Each one of us was once a child whose potential was identified, shaped, and released, but by age 9 most of us already have our spiritual moorings.

So, are we starting the process of spiritual formation in our children's lives early? Parents, our kids are growing up in difficult times – times you and I never had to navigate. How then, do we build resilient, healthy and faith-filled children who can navigate this ever-changing world?

Today I wanted to wrap up our Build to Last series by looking at Spiritual Formation in the Home. I want to do this because home is the most influential place in our lives.

If we want to grow a healthy next generation, that is not something we can outsource to the church, the children's ministry, youth ministry or schools. God has placed Children in the care of their families, and there is a family responsibility to help them grow in a way that honours God, and helps them reach their full potential.

If you missed my recent message on parenting, you can still find that on our YouTube channel and website. We will also be having Gavin Fish run a parenting workshop for us in July, so I'm not going to go over the responsibilities of parents again. Instead, I want to focus on the question:

What do children need?

If you are not a parent or grandparent, please don't switch off – these issues we are talking about are foundational to us all – they impact all of our relationships and there will be something for everyone to learn. Not everyone here today had a good time growing up, and I know that there is not one of us here who had perfect parents who did not make mistakes.

Some of you have grown up away from your parents, some may have had a real difficult childhood. Other had wonderful childhoods, but maybe the foundations of faith were not there. Each of us can apply these principles to our lives also. In fact, it is better if you start with yourself, before we try to help the children in our lives understand them! So, what do children need?

Well, Maslow famously described the needs of a person in a pyramid. You've probably seen this in some form or another.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

At the bottom, physiological needs - food, water, shelter, sleep, clothing. Then above that, safety needs - security, resources, health. Then above that, love and belonging - intimacy, family, sense of connection. Then in the green, self-esteem, recognition, freedom. And finally, at the top - desire to become the most that one can be.

Now as much as we can gain insight from this, I want to focus rather on what the bible says to us about raising our children to be spiritual champions!

So this morning, I have four points I want to share with you. In fact, these points are relevant for every single person growing as a disciple of Christ. Number 1; here we go;

Help them identify purpose in life.

One the big questions that people ask, is; why are we here? What is the purpose for life? What is my purpose?

One of the most common questions we ask kids when they are little, is? ... What do you want to be when you grow up? This is something that carries on through High School, as children navigate what their place in the world will be. What unique contribution can they make?

From a biblical perspective, God has a general purpose for all of us;

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ ; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)

We know this is God’s will for all of us. But we all have a unique and special purpose for our lives; the Psalmist wrote;

I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. (Psalm 57:2, NLT)

God has a general purpose for us all to love him, and worship him, but God also calls us to a specific purpose.

The Bible is full of examples of people called by God for a specific purpose and time.

Joseph, son of Jacob – called to rule Egypt and protect Israel.

Moses – called to rescue Israel and lead the people to the Promised Land.

David – called to restore spiritual purity, peace and prosperity.

Peter – called to establish and pastor churches among the Jews.

What can you do to help the youngsters with whom you have contact, to discover God’s purpose for their lives? As we read the bible as a family, and see God’s unique call on different people’s lives, the gifts and talents that God gives us, as well as the unique personalities and interests we each have, we can ask the question; ‘What do I want to be when I grow up?’ In a way that includes faith, and God’s unique call for each of us.

As Esther’s uncle asked her:

And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

How can we help children understand and commit to God’s mission and purpose for their lives in this day and time?

How can we help them know that it was their God who initiated their existence, and it was He who knit them together in their mother’s womb. And He has a plan for their lives. How can we make sure that they know that out of a world population of 8 billion people, that they are the only ones with their fingerprints. That on the stage of life, theirs is a role, that only they can play.

I want us to stop now, to take a moment to pause and pray for our kids... I would like to ask if there is someone who feels led by the Lord to do that. Please, only if it is something God is impressing on you do do...

Pray.

Amen. Next point...

Help them find a biblical worldview perspective

It seems that by the time a child turns 9, he or she shifts mental gears and begins to use everything that they have learnt up until that point to either confirm, or challenge everything they have learnt. By the time they reach this age, it is more difficult to change though. Their perspective is usually set. We call this a worldview. It's the way they see-the-world, and they either view it in a biblical way, or in an unbiblical way.

The role of a parent is therefore enormous! You have a massive amount of influence over your children. For example, if you allow them to ingest just anything from mass media – movies, television, music, books, and the internet, that gate-keeping role of yours can tremendously impact their thinking and worldview. If you think about this, the church has a very limited influence in this way. So, as the parents, your challenge is to enable your kids to develop a biblical worldview.

Children need to know how to make sense of the world. We need to raise discerning kids who can read the times that we are in. In Chronicles, it is said that the men of Issachar;

“understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” (1 Chronicles 12:32)

But how do we do that – not just for our kids but for ourselves? Well, there are some Cornerstones that we need to be building on; firstly...

- **Cornerstone #1: A high view of scripture**

Both young and old we need a good understanding of the Bible. Paul said;

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

This is not something that you can just get from just listening to a message on Sunday, or even YouTube sermons in the week. We need to be reading the Bible for ourselves, and teaching our kids to do the same.

Do you understand what a privilege it is to have your own bible in your house? To have it as a app on your phone? In some countries, that is not safe for believers, in other countries, people cannot afford their own bible, and others still don't have a translation in their own language. What a privilege to have the Word of God at our fingertips!

- **Cornerstone #2: A burning desire to obey God**

We teach here all the time, that it is not just about accumulating Bible knowledge, but also putting it into practise. James said;

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22)

To live the Christian life, you need to learn to love God, you need to learn to hear his voice, and you need to learn to obey him. Those are the three primary parts of every Christian disciples life.

And this journey starts with learning to obeying our parents. The bible gives one primary instruction to children, which is in Ephesians 6 verse 1. It simply says;

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

And then it says to all the rest of us; **“Honour your father and mother.”**

So basically, honour your parents no matter how old you are, but if you are a child, you must obey them. As you get older, you get to a place where you do not have to obey them, but you must still honour them. But to children – Obey your parents!

This is all over scripture, 1 Tim 3; Tit 2. It's clear. So part of raising spiritual champions, is the journey of learning obedience.

So, this means if you have a cheeky kid. You get rid of that cheek. If you have a sulky kid, and you say stop being sulky, they should obey you. If you have a lazy kid, and you say stop being lazy, they should obey you. If you have a kid with bad manners, and you tell them to have good manners, all the while, showing them how, they should obey you.

Now, one of the things that has always bugged me, is when parents count to three. I've never liked that. Why? Well, I believe it trains children to think that they can obey on their terms. It's basically saying; “look I want you to obey me, but you can decide when.” My kids are far from perfect, but Shelley and I have tried to teach them that obedience is meant to be immediate!

Delayed obedience, is disobedience. Think about it, if God tells us to do something, do you think its something we can wait three days before we decide to do it. No! If God tells us to do something, who of you would expect him to count to three?

A few years ago I learnt this little saying which I used on my kids. Until it started annoying them. “Obey, straight away.”... “Obey, Straight away, with a good attitude.” Granted, some kids don't really understand attitude, so you may want to say “with a happy face.” “Obey... straight away... with a happy face!”

Everyone say, “Obey”... “Straight away”... “With a happy face!” Nice.

This will train them, so that one day, when God speaks to them about doing something, what are they going to do? They are going to... “Obey... straight away... with a happy face!” You got it!

As they learn to obey you, they will learn how to obey their heavenly Father. Impart to them a burning desire to obey God and you will set them in good stead to becoming a spiritual champion!

Next one;

- **Cornerstone #3: A reliance on the Holy Spirit**

Jesus wants his children to be in step with the Spirit. Strong in the word, and strong in the Spirit. Without the power of the Spirit, and without a strong reliance on the Spirit, no Christian can survive. Our kids need to be filled with the Spirit! The Spirit was given to help us. Jesus said;

the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

So, how's it going with these cornerstones of faith in your lives and in your homes?

A high view of the bible, a burning desire to obey God, and a reliance on the Holy Spirit. These are the things that will help give them a biblical perspective and correct worldview.

Here's another thought. What kind of conversations are you having with you kids?

Sometimes the best way to speak into their lives is not by calling some 'serious family gathering' but simply by asking some good questions and having conversations.

Here are some basic ones to process over supper if you ever need a place to start.

- Does God exist?
- What is God like? (The character and nature of God)
- How and why was the world created?
- What is the purpose of humanity?
- What happens after we die on Earth?
- What spiritual authorities exist?
- What is truth?

And this is important to add, if they express a bit of doubt, or confusion, don't get angry with them! Vulnerable is not bad. Is your home a safe space to express doubt? Allow them to express their vulnerabilities in faith, and be honest with yours. Sharing your struggles is something that will help them, not weaken them.

Barna says;

“If you raise them to be a compliant workhorse, then don't expect them to suddenly turn around one day and become a majestic thoroughbred.” Fill them God, show them God!

Just before we jump to the next point. I want to take a moment to stop, and take just a few moments, to be silent before the Lord. In the silence and quietness of your own heart & soul, I want you to offer up a prayer to the Lord; to make yourself, and our young people, strong in the Word of God, to give us and them and a burning desire to obey him, and to learn to live, with a full reliance on the Holy Spirit...

Lets do that now for a short while...

Amen.

There are two more points I would like to share with you... Number 3;

Help by providing what they need to grow & mature

If children are consumed by fears and worries regarding safety and capacity, little growth can occur. This includes emotional security & empowering children to grow. Barca said;

“We find that young people feel empowered when they are able to see themselves as significant human beings.” (Barna)

We touched on this a few weeks ago, that as parents, we have a responsibility to care for our children – this means physical care, education, financial provision and also spiritual care.

1 Timothy 5:8 says; **“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”**

According to scripture, every man, and I would argue, that every woman, must work hard to provide for their family, and especially their children. This is pleasing to the Lord.

Here is the final point today;

Model the specific activities that will enable them to lead productive & meaningful lives.

Tracey recently spoke about the importance of laying a good foundation. That is the ultimate goal for us as well with our young people - to build a strong spiritual foundation.

We want to encourage our kids to live out their faith in their everyday lives. This means letting them get involved in different aspects of the Christian life including:

- **Worship**
- **Evangelism**
- **Discipleship**
- **Stewardship**
- **Service**
- **Community**

These can be considered the six pillars of Christian formation:

Worship - Evangelism - Discipleship - Stewardship - Service - and Community.

How do we do this? Well. We need to live by example. Model it.

Kids are not daft! They are quick to see when we teach about things that we do not do! They are like little hypocrite detectors. Lazy parents, who are disobedient to God, can't expect great results. You cannot be disobedient to God and want to have children who are obedient to you.

Such fathers may speak good wisdom, but it is overshadowed by the loudness of the hypocrisy in their lives. Foolish parents say; "Well, don't do as I do, do as I say." What they really mean is, "I am a complete hypocrite, but do what I tell you to do anyway." Proverbs says that these kind of fathers speak with no authority and so their children ignore them or mock them as funny and foolish hypocrites.

Tragically, these children often face the most devastating teenage years because they have no wise parents to turn to in a culture of stupidity, and they fall prey to many sins and pains. Therefore, if a parent is going to be a good parent, they need to start by living in such a way that their children will celebrate their lives and respect them as respectable people.

Model the Christian life for them. Model worship. Model evangelism. Model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Model Godly stewardship, service, and the importance of community.

The ultimate goal here is to see our children grow to love and worship our God. The idea is that as particular generations worship God, God intends their children to do the same. That's why we get this phraseology in the Old Testament, where it says "so and so" worships the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob etc. We want to raise Godly generations to follow us.

Conclusion

So as we come to the end of our Build to Last series, I trust it has been helpful.

I trust that you building on the foundation of God's word, I trust you are you obeying Him, and seeking the Holy Spirit's help.

May God give us strong relationships - that can withstand all that comes our way.

Amen.

(At the 10am) We are going to end the live stream now - for those who have been joining us there, God bless you.

Church Update

Prayer