

Why Start a Parenting Ministry in Your Church?

By Gary Ezzo.

God ordained two institutions for the express purpose of communicating to each subsequent generation the knowledge of Himself. These are the FAMILY and the CHURCH. In the family, the process is called PARENTING and in the church it is called DISCIPLESHIP.

Have you ever thought about starting a discipleship-based parenting ministry in your church?

Consider these FIVE reasons

1. DESPERATE PARENTS TEND TO LOOK IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES FOR HELP

Today we live in a society that is fundamentally hostile toward Christian values and the Christian family. Concerned parents who want to raise good children are virtually at war with their community. They must fight against television, pornography, drugs, premarital sex, crude public advertising, values-less education, degrading schools and negative peer pressure. Parents are groping for guidance. They no longer trust themselves to parent effectively, and as a result, they parent without conviction and also with fear. This is partly due to the fact that varying textbook theories have replaced the Titus 2 fathers and mothers in the church. If the church offers no alternative to the secular community, then desperate parents seeking relief will turn to all the wrong places for help. Can we expect secular minds to teach our children the values that reflect the holiness of God? Will they better teach our children how to honour their father and mother (Deut. 6 vs 4-9_ or to love their neighbours as themselves? Indeed not! Families are the nurseries of both the church and the state whose hand is rocking the cradle? It best be dad and mum who are members of the community of faith.

2. IT IS THE CHURCHES' RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE EVERY PARENT A GOOD THEOLOGIAN

One of the primary duties of the church is to feed the flock of God with the whole counsel of God. Theology works best when all Christians, not just professional theologians are involved in it. A theologically-based parenting ministry is important to the church because the most significant group of theologians in the world are mums and dads who have the inexpressible privilege of teaching great truths about God to their children. Every Christian parent is a theologian because every child of God entered the kingdom on the basis of certain truths he understood about God. If you think about it, in a very unique and important sense, Christian parents not only have a theology because they are God's children, they teach theology every day because they have children. It was not enough for men and women of Israel to know that "The Lord is God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6 v 4). Moses commanded them to instruct their children diligently about God so they too, would grow to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6 v 5). Good theology must lead to practice. After all, good theology, if it is not fleshed out everyday, rubber-meets-the-road stuff, it is just that - good theology and nothing more. At some point, our theology must express itself in practice. Without sound practice, we become hearers of the Word, and not doers, and only deceive ourselves (James 1 v 22). I heard a pastor say, "Parenting is not all that difficult. When your kids do something wrong, beat them!" Parenting is not a matter of beating up on children. Parenting is theology in practice. Consider how these Biblical doctrines work out in the family: Grace, justice, mercy, authority, kindness, long-suffering, honesty, integrity, discernment, wisdom and foolishness to name a few. The fact is that you cannot teach parenting without teaching theology. Who better to direct these truths to mums and dads, than the church.

3. A CHURCH-BASED PARENTING MINISTRY IS MORE THAN A BAND-AID

We live in a quick-fix society. Unfortunately, couples too often want a quick fix to their long-term parenting problems. We, in church leadership, do a dis-service to our people if all we offer are short-term solutions for long-term problems. Without a program of comprehensive parent/discipleship, that is exactly what we do. WE are only offering a bandaid to mask the problem, not to fix it. I think we have all been part of church services highlighting the importance of the family. Maybe it was a

weekend parenting conference or a month's worth of marriage enrichment videos. Most congregations appreciate what they heard, but they do not appropriate it. Appropriation comes through ongoing discipleship conducted in small groups (6-8 couples). Without discipleship, there is no back-pressure to learn. Why? Because there is no one holding the individual accountable for change. Any serious change in lives must come the old fashioned way (the way Jesus did it), through discipleship.

4. BIBLICAL PARENTING IS A REMEDY TO SPIRITUAL APOSTASY

In Genesis 12 v 1-3, God called out a people to Himself through whom He would bless the world. God's Kingdom ebbs and flows as God's children trust Him and live in obedience to His laws. Though the economy of God's redemptive plan has changed, with the establishment of the church, God is still raising up a people who will love Him supremely. In Psalm 78, we find that parenting is a key to trust in, and be in, obedience to God. "He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children so the next generation would know them, even the child yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children so they would put their trust in God, and would not forget his deeds but would keep His Commands." (vs 5-7). Trust and obedience increase, and apostasy declines as fathers tell, "the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders of what He has done." (Psa. 78 v 4). Where God-centred parenting fails, rebellion in the coming generations is certain. Kingdom-building churches, should be, indeed must be, parent-building churches.

5. A NEEDY WORLD IS STILL WATCHING

When God's values dwell richly in your church families, the world takes notice. A desperate society will still be viewing the Christian message long after it stops listening to our message. Can you see why this is true? In a society where natural family relationships are being destroyed, we, the church, have great opportunity to offer hope by our good behaviour (Matthew 5 v 16b). When we keep our behaviour pure, when we let our indwelling light shine forth - washing over our marriages, our children, our families, and our relationships with others, when we let the excellencies of Christ be seen in our members, our conduct will not go unnoticed. The compelling testimony of our faith is borne out by our actions and the reality of the gospel will stand in dramatic contrast to the negative consequences of others' poor choices (11 Peter 2 v 12). As a result, some of those in our midst will glorify God by accepting the gospel that we live before them. Jesus said if He be lifted up, the whole world will be drawn to Him (John 12 v 32). That should be the final conclusion of any discipleship-based ministry. If the world will not come to the church, then let us bring the church to the world through our families and show forth the Excellencies of Christ. As a pastor, I am committed to building the family of God born out of Pentecost, by helping strengthen the natural family born out of Eden.



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