7 Gifts

for church & home

Summary Gift Four

The Gift of Godly Parents

INFORMATION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Why Godly parents are so important

Parents are the primary spiritual mentors. The best thing the church can do for their children spiritually is to equip/resource parents to lead their children.

The research is clear that when it comes to passing on faith to the next generation, the single most important influence on children was the faith and relationship of parents with their children.

Christian Smith and Snell in their research (see *Souls in Transition* 2009) found that parents turn out to be the single most important influence on the religious outcomes in the lives of young adults. On the other hand, teenage participation in evangelization missions and youth groups does not predict a high level of religiosity just a few years later.

Vern Bengston, Putney and Harris (*Families and Faith: How religion is passed down across generations*, 2013) says that, "The influence within the home can be more powerful than forces at church, school or in society at large." This was the same for both those that were religious and those that were not. Children are more likely to adopt the faith of their parents and the religiousness of their parents. Children act on what they have seen in their parent's relationship with God and each other.

What has emerged in the research are significant factors for successful faith transmission. (See Brunner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, Denton and Pierce, *A Faith of their Own*, Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith* and Smith and Snell *Souls in Transition*)

- Parents modeling how to practice their faith by attending and serving in the church is important, but that influence can be blunted if either parent does not have a close relationship with their children.
- There is a strong correlation between the religiosity of young adults and a close relationship with their father.
- Parents who gave their children room to question, doubt and work out their faith identity were more successful in passing on faith then those who over-reacted or shut down questioning and doubt.
- Segregated church environments can create a culture that makes parents antagonists rather than partners in the process of religiously socializing children.
- Young adults who reject the religion of their parents and then come back are those who had a close relationship with their parents, saw them consistently living their faith and had the freedom to find their own religious identity.

What can CHURCHES do?

Equip parents.

1. RUN PARENTING/DISCIPLESHIP CLASSES OR WEEKENDS. WE NEED TO LEVERAGE THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOME AND HELP OUR PARENTS TO BE THE BEST PARENTS/DISCIPLES POSSIBLE.
2. MAKE SURE ALL YOUR PROGRAMS ARE FAMILY FRIENDLY. CHURCHES NEED TO LOOK AT WHY THEY DO WHAT THEY DO AND DESIGN THEIR WORSHIPS AND PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE THE HOME AND FAMILY TIME RATHER THAN DETRACT FROM IT.
3. MAKE YOUR MINISTRIES AND PROGRAMS INTERGENERATIONAL. OUR CHILDREN NEED TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH THEIR PARENTS AND PEOPLE OF FAITH. THIS MIGHT BE ONE OF THE FEW TIMES ALL WEEK THAT FAMILIES GET TO BE TOGETHER AND SO LETS ENCOURAGE THAT RATHER THAN REMOVE THEM FROM THEIR PRIMARY SPIRITUAL MENTORS.
4. INCLUDE AND WELCOME PARENTS INTO YOUR CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS. WITH THE HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF CHILD PROTECTION BUT ALSO BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT PARENTS ARE THE PRIMARY FAITH INFLUENCERS OF THEIR CHILDREN IT MAKES SNES TO INVOLVED THEM IN YOUR PROGRAMS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE RATHER THEN REMOVE THEM.

What can FAMILIES do?

Love God — let your children catch you. Children are more likely to adopt the faith of their parents.

1. PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES/RITUALS – RITUALS PRACTICED BOTH AT CHURCH AND HOME HAVE THE GREAT POWER TO SPIRITUALLY FORM OUR CHILDREN AND OURSELVES. RITUALS AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IMPRINTS GOD'S STORY UPON US AND HELPS US AND OUR FAMILIES TO UNDERSTAND IT IN A WAY THAT HEARING IT CANNOT DO. AS OUR CHILDREN WATCH US PERFORM AND AS THEY PARTICIPATE IN OUR RITUALS AND TRADITIONS, THEY ARE AMAZING IN THEIR TRANSFORMATIVE POWER.
2. CALL YOUR FAMILY TO PRAYER AND WORSHIP - HORACE BUSHNELL IN CHRISTIAN NURTURE, SPEAKS OF FAMILY AS A "LITTLE CHURCH" AND BELIEVES THAT THE PRIMARY AGENT OF GRACE IS FAMILY, NOT CHURCH. HE MAINTAINS THAT "RELIGION NEVER THOROUGHLY PENETRATES LIFE UNTIL IT BECOMES DOMESTIC". THIS HAPPENS IN THE DAY TO DAY RHYTHMS OF FAMILY LIFE.
3. LET YOUR CHILD SEE HOW GOD WORKS FOR YOU IN THE GOOD TIMES AND TOUGH TIMES. CHILDREN ARE INTERESTED IN HOW GOD FOR YOU AT CHURCH BUT THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN HOW THIS WORKS IN YOUR WORK, SOCIAL SETTING, MARRIAGE AND ESPECIALLY IN THE TOUGH TIMES. WHEN THEY SEE HOW GOD WORKS FOR THEIR PARENTS THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO ADOPT THAT SAME FAITH.
4. CAPTURE THE DAILY "GOD MOMENTS" – IDENTIFY ANSWERS TO PRAYER, IDENTIFY WHEN GOD SHOWED UP DURING YOUR FAMILIES DAY.

5 Questions for Boards and Churches to Discuss/Brainstorm

1. HOW CAN WE AS A CHURCH BEST TRANSITION FROM A SABBATH CHURCH TO A 24/7 CHURCH? WHAT IS OUR STRATEGY?

2. HOW CAN WE BEST EQUIP PARENTS TO BE THE BEST MODELS OF FAITH THAT THEY CAN BE IN THEIR HOMES?

3. WHAT IDEAS CAN WE PUT IN PLACE TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR SERMONS AND WORSHIP DOES NOT JUST STAY AT CHURCH BUT PERMEATES THE FABRIC OF OUR FAMILIES 24/7 LIVING?

4. WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP STRENGTHEN THE HOMES OF THE PARENTS IN OUR CONGREGATION?

5. WHAT SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES/RITUALS DO WE WANT TO SEE PARENTS MODEL IN THEIR HOMES AND HOW WILL WE HELP THEM TO DO THAT?

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