

The Key to Passing Faith onto the Next Generation

Proposition: The most effective way to teach lasting faith is to model it in the home!

I love 'the church' world-wide in all its different shapes and styles. I think that there is a huge variety in personality and passions in us all and I think in most countries people can find a local church, a local team to serve with that fits them.

When I first came to faith at 16 years of age I was baptized into a Pentecostal Methodist church. In my second year of faith I noticed an Anglican church that was nearly dead and so I volunteered to run a youth group for them. I have worked with and supported AOG churches; New Life and Elim churches and spent three years in the Apostolic church in Taupo.

All of those churches were good and yet I have really come to love the Baptist movement. Each movement has its strengths and its own style. Baptists I have found are strongly into the Word and into every Christian doing something in ministry for the Lord. In an average church in the western world 15% of the people are involved in Christian service either, in the church or through the church into the community. In our church about 80% of us are committed to serving God in some way on a weekly basis. It's a strength I like. Also in the Baptist movement, while we respect and listen to our local and national leaders it seems to me that no one is out to grand stand or to become famous. Like our elders our regional and national leaders and consultants lead from a real servant attitude. If we need professional help with any ministry in the church there are people in the national office that would help us. Ten years ago this church, in my perception of it, nearly died and the national office sent Trevor Donnell to get the church back on its feet again. Our national leaders have helped keep our church alive and healthy.

In NZ the biggest provider of youth services in the country, larger than any other Christian movement or sporting group or government department is The Baptist movement. We run brilliant youth groups, youth services, youth camps and we help and resource other Christian movements.

A number of years ago our national leaders, while looking at the big picture of what the Lord is doing in NZ noticed something heart-breaking that is something that is also happening in most churches in the western world, that is this that huge numbers of young people who have been to children's church and youth group and easter camps are opting out of church permanently between the ages of 18-30.

I think it was about 3 years ago that the Movement paid Nigel Cottle for a year to do a research project on why so many youth were opting out of faith when they became young adults. I vaguely recall some of the things Nigel discovered as he interviewed so many young adults and studied our culture. Basically he said that in the Baptist movement in NZ between 85-90% of young adults are leaving the church and their faith during this age group.

Now I have always thought that this sort of thing happened because these young people lacked real personal experiences of God or they hadn't been walked through the evolution/ creation debate well, but that is not what Nigel found. Aside from the fact that this generation has been trained by our society to be more self focused and self serving than previous generations he felt that the major

problem was the poor link that young people have with the rest of the church growing up, that they are not integrated into the church through the years but have their own children's program and intermediate programs and youth programs, programs tailored just for them and so when they get 18 and they find they are too old for youth group, they don't see themselves as part of the church family. The Church is irrelevant, it doesn't serve them and so they opt out. Nigel could see that young people needed to be integrated better into the church throughout the whole process and by 18 need to be already believing that this is their community. He challenges us to be intentional in helping them with that. He says that the biggest problem is a disconnect with the rest of the church because they have always had programs just for them. They haven't learnt to serve in the church, they haven't made friends with other generations and so they opt out. This is tragic and a real concern to everyone.

Our intercessors team have a list of prodigals that they know of, and they pray for on a regular basis. These are people who once committed their lives to Jesus but appear to have walked away from faith. Bev, how big would that list be now? Can other people in the church add people they know to that list? Prayer works and we will see results from those prayers.

At assembly last year the national leaders brought in as a guest speaker a man called Mark Holmen. Mark founded the Faith@home movement. He wrote a book entitled "Church+Home" that I want to refer to a lot this morning.

As he shared with us at the national gathering, I have to say, I was both disturbed by the facts, the state of things that the statistics show, and at the same time really encouraged to do all that I can as a pastor to make sure families, and uncles and aunts and honorary parents are resourced better by this church to make sure that none of our children or grandchildren end up in that 85-90% statistic, and that no more of our children and mukapuna end up on that prodigals list.

Inside the cover of this book Mark Holman says this:

"Current statistics reveal that somewhere between 60-90% percent of children enrolled in church programs are going to disengage from their faith when they become young adults. The primary reason cited for their disengagement is hypocrisy. Why do these young adults, who were at one time church children, think Christianity is hypocritical? Because they were raised in an environment where Christianity was practiced and expressed primarily at church and not at home.

Of all the things you can do as a leader in Christ's Church, is anything more important than helping to bring Christ and Christ like living into the centre of every home? What do you want your legacy to be? What does success look like to you? Will it just be building a large congregation and a big beautiful facility? Or will it be equipping to live out their faith at home so that we don't lose from the faith the generations to come?

- **Mark Holman**

George Barna a very famous Christian researcher and statistician wrote a book called "Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions". Let me read you two quotes from his book.

‘What you do with children – yours and others – is the most important ministry thrust you will ever undertake.’

- George Barna

-

‘Having now conducted thousands of interviews with parents and children regarding moral and spiritual development, some elements of the process have become crystal clear. For instance, the local church plays a role in the growth of children, but its involvement is not the key to success in raising godly children. The critical factor is what takes place in the home. Parents have an overwhelmingly significant influence of who their children turn out to be. A community of faith can – and should – support parents in that effort, but the responsibility and opportunity to raise God-honoring children has been given to the parents.’

- George Barna

As we have bought into a life style in the West where things just get busier and busier; where two parents are working; where we put as many opportunities in front of our children and families as we possibly can. We have begun to leave different areas of their growth to the professionals, and that has been true of spiritual growth for many families. Instead of praying with our kids, or teaching them how to interpret life biblically, or prophesying over them and helping them hear God’s voice personally, instead of worshiping with our kids or being involved in Christian service with them we have said; we will get the children’s church or the intermediate club or the youth group leaders to do that.

Again George Barna’s research shows that in churches:

Only 12% of youth have regular dialog with their mother on faith and life issues.

Only 5 % of youth have a regular dialog with their father on faith and life issues.

Only 9% of youth have experienced regular reading of the Bible and devotions at home.

Only 12% of youth have experienced a servant hood event with a parent as an action of faith.

Now I am biased because I believe that this family is doing much better than the statistics that Nigel and Mark and George have come up with but the challenge is serious.

Where in God’s plan for passing on faith is faith primarily to be taught?

Deuteronomy 6:3-7 (CEV)

³Pay attention, Israel! Our ancestors worshiped the LORD, and he promised to give us this land that is rich with milk and honey. Be careful to obey him, and you will become a successful and powerful nation. ⁴Listen, Israel! The LORD our God is the only true God! ⁵So love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. ⁶Memorize his laws ⁷and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning.

God intended for faith to be taught and nurtured, primarily at home, in families.

There was a survey conducted in America amongst protestant churches and over a thousand young people were asked who/ what had been their most significant spiritual influences.

1. By far the greatest influence for God for them was ... mum
2. Dad came a distant second
3. The pastor came third
4. Youth group fourth
5. The Bible
6. Grand parents
- 7.

Impersonal things like Christian radio or TV or revival meetings hardly factored in their responses at all, and were bottom of a long list.

As Mark Holman was speaking at conference about why we need the home and church and how the church can equip parents and siblings and uncles and aunts and grandparents to be effective teachers of faith at home, I began to talk to God on the inside. Lord if it takes more than a two hour program a week for faith to really stick and become life transforming. Lord then what about us at Ranui?

Lord at Ranui there are a lot of new Christian parents for whom faith is so new. Lord they barely know how to pray themselves let alone pray with their kids.

Lord at Ranui we have a lot of great single parents how do they model faith at home on their own?

Lord at Ranui we have a lot of kids we just love who don't have any Christian relative. Lord will these kids who don't get to see what faith looks like practically in the home. Lord will they be OK? Lord how will they learn to trust you and walk with you all the days of their lives?

And I felt God saying to me. I have increased the size of the hearts of my people at Ranui so they can love more than their own flesh and blood. I have caused people in the church to have the love of a parent or a uncle or aunty or a grandparent for those that don't have a spiritual mentor. I will cause my people to take responsibility for kids that don't have Christian family.

Now I know that is true. I recognise that in my own heart I am committed to praying for, spending time with a number of youth and children who come to our church and programs who are not my own. But I love them like a dad or like a uncle or a grandparent would. And I recognise that dynamic in our children's ministers and our youth leaders. I see it in church members. I see it in Christine Bartle, in Les Clarke, in Greg Palmer and Mike Williams and Kay and Glenice and so many of our family. God will look after these kids and help them see faith at work, during the week, because he has increased our hearts capacity to cover them as well.

This year I am going to use the family services during the holidays and other vehicles to put as many resources into your hands as possible so you can model faith outside of the church scene to your children and youth. That is your own and the ones that God will cause you to adopt in your hearts. I will share with you some of the things that worked for Juliette and I and get others to share what worked for them.

For instance as our kids were growing up Juliette and I did really well at daily debriefing and helping our kids see life (the good and the bad) through the eyes of faith. We were good at sharing

testimonies and stories with our kids and sometimes read stories about bible heroes or historical heroes of the faith. We weren't good however, at doing family devotions, or prayer times, or worship times together, we were just too hyperactive for that. So I hope to give you inspiration for modelling faith at home from other people as well.

One tool that my good friend Robert has been putting together is on our website and at our next staff meeting I will get Robert to show Tai, myself, Michael and Agnes and Les how to make this really work for Ranui.

But here's the start of a tool to bless you as we determine to have no more added to the prodigal list, as we fulfil our greatest mission to have faith passed onto the next generation.

ROBERT; DEMO WEBSITE ON BIG SCREEN

Friends I want this year to be a year where the Holy Spirit finds us and our meetings irresistible.

Friends I want this year to be a year where 'our children' (in the broadest sense) have their faith so firmly established that they will never walk away from Jesus or His bride the church.

I want to lead you in three prayers in closing:

Would those up to and including the 17 year olds please stand.

Prayer; integration, belong, experience, ministry, relationship to God

Would the 18-30yr olds please stand

Prayer; stand out, be different, strong as you face the pressures/ temptations of life, learn to serve and lead, Godly marriages, and blessed children.

Would everyone else stand

Prayer; live for you Lord 24/7, help us show our kids and grandchildren faith in action, godly grace/ forgiveness, give us courage, help us seize the great opportunity you have given us to equip our children for this life and for eternity.