

Faith begins at home

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In 2008 I had the wonderful privilege of attending two children and family ministry conferences in the USA.

I had high expectations of learning loads of new things, getting inspired by brilliant speakers with new ideas and coming back with heaps of new tools in my bag. Wonderful stuff for anybody working in children's ministry!

All of these things did happen.

However, the bigger reality is: I came out of those two conferences challenged beyond what I ever could have imagined and in a way that is now redefining everything I am doing at home, as a mother and at church, as a children and families pastor.

I would like to share with you my key "take home message" and the challenge I believe we are all facing in our churches and as parents.

Firstly, we need to look at some important and alarming statistics:

- Most spiritual development takes place before we reach adulthood
- Moral foundations are generally in place by the time we reach age 9
- A person's response to Jesus Christ is usually determined before they reach age 18

• Spiritual beliefs are formed by the time we are 13 years old

Statistics also show that we are currently losing the battle for the hearts and minds of 50-80% of children raised in Christian homes. They walk away from their Christian faith by the time they go to college. Even the most conservative estimates suggest an alarming trend!

The reality is: Churches and families are facing a huge problem – we are losing our next generation when it comes to faith transference.

Why is this happening? Is the Church failing? No, the Church is not failing. There is a level of excellence in children's and youth ministries today that far exceeds what many of us experienced as children growing up in Church.

The Church has never been more intentional. There is a role that the Church must play, that only the Church can play, when it comes to instilling strong faith in the next generation.

However, there is also a role that only the family can play.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 we read: "Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children.

Talk about them when you are at home [having dinner together, during family time, etc.] and when you are on the road [driving them to school, sports practice, dance classes, etc.], when you are going to bed [when you put your kids to bed] and when you are getting up [first thing in the morning, before school and work]. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates [memory verses that we stick on our fridges or walls at home]."

God is talking to parents! This is about being intentional at home. God designed the home, the family, as the primary place for spiritual formation.

Reggie Joiner (North Pointe Church in Atlanta, USA) makes the simple yet startling comparison: On average the Church has 40 hours in every year to impact our children's faith, their friendships and close relationships.

Parents have 3000 hours in the same year.

This is not rocket science. What happens at home is more important than what happens at church. As parents and grandparents, we need to be intentional with our children at home if we want faith transference to happen. We need to teach our children eternal, biblical truths on a daily basis, not just once a week at church. It has to become part of our everyday,



family life.

The reality is that we all, as families, face struggles. We are living in an era of incredible busyness. Parents work often long, hard hours to meet financial needs and overcome financial struggles; crammed schedules and a constant rush to meet deadlines and commitments are a reality for every family; children are often in the care of non-family adults for the biggest part of their day; and with all of these struggles, we experience the stress that it places on relationships within any family unit.

We are living in an era of changed and challenging family units: single parent families, mixed culture families, combined families. There is a high rate of divorce and also an increasing number of non-marriage partnerships.

We are living in an era where parents are feeling ill-equipped to deal with the spiritual formation of their children. Name any church, any denomination, and you see hurting marriages, hurting families, and parents struggling to pass down their faith to their children. The problems facing families are the same everywhere.

In summary, we have a generation of children and teenagers in serious need of intentionality at home, for faith transference to take place.

We as a Church have a huge responsibility to equip parents, in our Church family and in our community, with whatever tools they need to be intentional.

We need to be serious about our partnership between parents and the Church, in order to shape our children's relationship with God.

The time has come for us to step back, take a good look at the reality and where we are, understand where we need to go, and equip ourselves to do it!

We need to ask – and answer – these two questions: What are we doing at home to shape the faith of our children and grandchildren? What can your church do to partner with you in your journey with your children, to give them the best possible chance of choosing Jesus Christ for life?

Sources:

Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions by George Barna

Growing a Faith that Lasts by Dr. John Trent and Kurt Bruner
Think ORANGE by Reggie Joiner

Christian grads meet together for 'Catalyst'

Christian academics, post-graduates and graduates got together recently for their own conference.

Catalyst is the Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship's ministry to graduates and academics. The vision is to grow a new generation of graduates who are transformed by the gospel and who will keep the gospel at the heart of the workplace and academy. Catalyst seeks to equip Christians to live out their faith in the workplace, integrating faith and work in a way which honours God and is effective for the kingdom.

Over the past 18 months Catalyst has been taking shape, building infrastructure, resources and networks. This year TSCF hosted the first Catalyst conference.

The weekend featured a keynote address by Nigel Pollock (TSCF National Director) with separate tracks for academics, postgraduates and graduates. Each delegate was given the opportunity to share encouragements and challenges with others in their field. The tracks were delivered by some of New Zealand's key contributors on these subjects including Bev Norsworthy, Jonathan Boston and Wayne Kirkland.

Many delegates left the conference having thought more deeply about how their faith integrates



Worship at the Catalyst conference.

with their work while others were encouraged just by having met others in their field.

A significant legacy from the weekend was that many delegates left considering the opportunity to lead or join Catalyst groups – groups of Christians in a church, region, field or workplace who meet together to encourage one another to live for Christ in their

workplace.

Pete Brown, a Baptist and an environmental engineer, took part in the workplace track and said he found it encouraging to hear speakers talk about how work is more than just an opportunity for evangelism, and also to see how work fits into the whole story of the Bible.

Paul Stock, on the academics

track said, "It was wonderful to be reminded that there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, and to look at that in the context of academic scholarship."

Mark Grace, who heads up Catalyst for TSCF was delighted with the gathering.

"It's been a fantastic conference," he said. "Young graduates

have come away better able to join with others to live for Christ in the workplace. Postgraduate students have been given a vision for research informed by a Christian worldview. Academics gained encouragement and support to continue to stand for Jesus in the academy."

• Information: www.catalyst.ac.nz