

FAMILIES FIRST NEWSLETTER

Assisting Parents with the Spiritual Formation of Their Children



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"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I Thessalonians
5:16-18

Throw An Apron Over Your Head!

Amidst the joy of celebrating Mother's Day with my four year old, I took time to think of my own mother who passed away seven years ago and about how much she and Claire would have had in common. They have very similar personalities that include a zest for life, a joyous outlook, a quick laugh, and a strong will. When I think of my mother, I often see her in my mind's eye doing the dishes for a family of six back in the mid '60's. She always had a gingham-checked apron tied around her waist on which she had cross-stitched patterns of pineapples or roses. I remember my grandmother who also always wore an apron, though usually of the full, wrap-around style. Aprons were a very ordinary part of my early life that I took for granted. That is certainly not the case today. I am fairly certain that in her almost five years of life, Claire has never seen me wear an apron. But maybe that is a bigger problem than one might initially think.

During a recent Bible study, I was reminded of a story of another strong-willed mother, Susannah Wesley. I related a story that I had heard about her and her devotion to prayer. As the mother of 10 children, Susannah could not always find a quiet room to retreat

to in prayer. During those times, Susannah would flip her apron up over her head and pray wherever she was! She taught her children that when they saw her with the apron over her head that she was in prayer with the Lord and they were not to interrupt.



Ephesians 6:18 says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." I think sitting in a busy kitchen with an apron over your head certainly qualifies as "on all occasions". Again, I Thessalonians 5:16-18 states, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." What a remarkable legacy that would be to leave to one's children. I can't think of a better way to be remembered than in prayer, even if it includes the picture of me sitting in a kitchen chair with an apron over my head.

So to all the mothers who are reading this, I ask you to join with me and throw an apron over your head! Do it not only for you, but for your children.

Darlene Maginley

Who's The Boss?

I have had the good fortune to be involved with a men's Bible study this year. Many of the guys have teenage sons and daughters. This gave us a great area of common ground, and I attempted to help a few through some of the hard times. I also learned quite a bit myself from their openness and honesty in parenting.

What struck me the most from my interactions with them is their focus on spiritual leadership. This was a topic that came up over and over again in prayer requests, struggles, and praises. Each week emphasized the importance of Dad being the spiritual head of the home. Each one of the men made comments that they had failed to lead well in their families' spiritual growth, or that they were worried about not leading well. One father had made changes just this year to initiate with his wife and grown children in an attempt better to lead them .

The very same thing has been an issue in my life as well. Some years back at a Promise Keepers rally, my father told my brother and me that he had failed us. He had been the hand of discipline and he had made sure we didn't step out of line spiritually. We were in church every weekend and it was a real faith that he enjoyed. He had even modeled this faith in front of the three of us kids. His apology, however, was for not initiating in my relationship with God. He didn't initiate any spiritual conversations with me, or challenge my thinking. We didn't do any devotions as a family and my mother was the more spiritually vocal of the two.

...you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children.
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

What happens when dads leave the spiritual maturation of their children up to someone else? The results are hit or miss. They might find a great mentor who encourages them to investigate God. They might find a spiritually mature

role model who can point them to a great bible reading plan or personal devotions; but I wouldn't count on it. We have the power to do something, so we certainly must not wait and hope for someone else to lead our families.

The two biggest problem areas for dads are; 1. leaving it to the women in our lives to lead, and 2. pointing in a direction rather than leading in a direction. First off, it is somewhat common for men to leave spiritual leadership up to their wives, kind of like balancing the check book. Common excuses are "She's better at it than I am." Or "It's more important to her." If we leave it up to our wives to educate our teenagers we run the risk of boys thinking that it is a woman's religion, and girls rebelling against being just like mom. God designed men to lead and both genders need dad to do that. Both parents need to provide a godly example of what it means to trust Christ as Savior and Lord. In my home, both my mom and dad did this; but my dad rightfully recognized that it needs to be carried another step further. He apologized for not encouraging me to read my bible, or discussing my reading with me. He didn't lead my family or me in Bible study after meals or after school.

God says this in Deuteronomy 6 to the men of Israel and it is true for the men of His church today. "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 and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. -NLT

How can we leave spiritual leadership to others in light of these commands?


Joe Rea


TAKING TO THE ROAD

Love God, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street, talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. (Deut. 6:5-9a MSG)


I was reminded by my son-in-law, Scott, just how much we open our children's eyes to things that have become common place to us. My granddaughter was wading in the lake and splashing around like any 23 month old would when her daddy said with excitement, "Look, Payton, there is your shadow." She gave a little squeal and has begun to learn something new about her world. There are so many of these conversations we have with our children to spark wonder and learning. The vision for Families First Newsletter, from its inception, has been and continues to be to support and encourage parents in the spiritual formation of their children.


Known well to all of you is that we don't take a vacation from parenting nor do we take a vacation from God. So as you head out of town for summer vacation here are a couple ideas to continue your family's faith formation:


 Make it a family adventure to attend church wherever you are vacationing. We would love to have your children or youth bring back a bulletin and tell Miss Abby, Joe or Miss Linda about your experience. Consider completing these sentences on your bulletin, "We saw..." "We heard..." "We thank God for..."

 Prepare vacation boxes which may include crayons, pencils, paper, bible puzzle books, comic or children's bible, some Christian DVD's like Adventures in Odyssey or Veggie Tales, craft kits and bible story books. Family Christian Stores and Cokesbury have

children's activity/puzzle books and reading appropriate for all ages.

 Get a stuffed animal and attach a journal to it. Help your children to record where you are along the way and the blessings from God you experienced. Write what you thanked God for each day. I will have a few travel animals ready if you want to take one of my friends with you and then we will pass the animal and journal on to another family until we have several families' vacations recorded in each journal. It will be fun to share in September the wonders of God we experienced this summer.

 Begin each day with a Psalm from the Old Testament and a prayer that asks for God's protection as you travel or play. Also ask Him to open your eyes to His many daily blessings as well as making your family a blessing to someone else that day.

 Close the day with what each family member thanks God for in that day. Make it a popcorn prayer of thanksgiving (anyone can pop in with something they are thankful for and then the next person, etc.).

Traveling to Egypt, I was absolutely out of my comfort zone and, therefore, found it easier and necessary to depend on God for each step of the day. Consequently I am still amazed at His incredible mercy and the outpouring of His grace. Jim and I never considered that people we just met would have us pray for them right there on the spot. We walked away from that and many other experiences humbled by God's desire to work through us. Returning home we are trying to walk daily in that same dependence. It has to be intentional, just like your efforts to take your family's faith formation on the road with you.

Safe Travel and God Bless, Linda

A Sign On My Forehead



Less than a month ago I returned to the USA from an incredible trip to Egypt where I had the incredible opportunity to minister to a group of children, show God's love to many people, pray for many, and talk with those who have a very different view of the world than I do. The whole trip was amazing (and a big thanks to all those who helped to make it possible), but there was an interesting thing about the trip, the whole time, I felt like I was wearing a big sign on my back (or perhaps my forehead) that said, "I'm an American." Wherever we went, people would ask where we were from, and then say, America? Almost everyone we encountered had preconceived ideas about what Americans were like, what we believe, and who we might vote for in the upcoming election. After our encounters, I pray that their ideas were not quite as solid about what Americans are like, and that their impressions from TV might not be accurate.

It got me to thinking about our lives as Christians in America and thinking about who we encounter and what ideas they might have about who we are and what we believe. I was thinking, "what if we walked around with a sign on our forehead here that says 'I'm a Christian.'" What would others think about us if they knew that we were Christian as we went about our daily lives? Would our every word, our every thought, our every action reflect the fact that we have been changed because we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior? How would this make others view Christians? Would they see us as hypocrites or would they see us as a true Christian, loving God, and loving neighbor in all we do?

If we thought that others were watching and deciding on what they think about Christians based on us, would we act differently? Would we treat our children differently? Would we let someone else go first in line?

How would it affect our smallest decision to our largest ones?

My good friend Heather (who took great care of us in Egypt) confided to us that she loves to bring Christians around friends in Egypt because they can tell that there is something different about us. She said that for a long time to come, they will inquire about us and ask how we are doing. They will note in their conversations with her that we are different, that we seem to care about them, and we want to help them. This we all pray will open doors for them to hear about Jesus Christ and why we (as Christians) are different. When those see the love that Christ has to offer, and they are given this love by a Christian, they begin to yearn for it, and they will come to know who this Christ is.

As Christians we are different, after we accept Christ, we become a new creation, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" How can we each day show that new creation? Our new creation is a silent evangelism tool, showing all how being a Christ follower makes us different, and hopefully inspires others to Christ. As parents, we can model this for our children, and our children can follow, because I believe that simply by being Christlike, we will continually bring others to Christ, and we will continually be showing love to our neighbor, and that will help make this world into the place that God wants it to be.

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