

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

Date: February 14, 2010 - Sunday before Lent

Title: “You, Your Family, Your God and Your Church”

Text: Misc.

Theme: Bring your kids to church and worship as a family among families at a geographically defined assembly with a biblical structure and mission.

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©2010

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

One of the adages of studying the development of doctrine is, “The church does not know what it believes until someone gets it wrong.” Progressively, I have become more aware and concerned for the families of our fellowship. In some, although not all, there is a lax attitude toward church attendance and aligning your family with the community of life this represents. I believe what this looks like can be different for all of us. It has many “faces”. But somehow in the ordering of your life, being involved in a local church should be one of your primary priorities. I am also aware how discussions like this can rapidly descend into binding formulas and unrealistic expectations, but in placing all of the necessary cautions in place let us not fear to venture forth into this sacred trust. When my wife and I were in the parenting season, it never occurred to us to miss church or to give our kids an option as to whether or not they would attend with us. Our attendance and theirs was assumed and presupposed. Perhaps my motive for having us/them go was less than pure (i.e. what others might think of us if we did not attend), yet the underlying idea was that church attendance was good for us and them. We wanted them to understand how Church life was to be a real part of our Christian walk.

I am currently reading in various sources about the significant dropout rate of those who once went to church but abandon the discipline once they leave the home, graduate from high school or attend college. The following statement is representative of what I consistently read in various sources.

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors. Where are all the people? Seventy percent of the people, 23 to 30 years old, are nowhere to be found in church on a regular basis for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22. They become church dropouts, according to a 2007 study from LifeWay Research. These students who attended a Protestant church at least twice a month for at least one year during high school are leaving the church, and most of them are doing so during their first year of college. Findings from the study, in which 1,023 adults, ages 18 to 30, were surveyed, reveal that 97% of dropouts give specific life-change issues as their reason for leaving. Only 20% of the dropouts predetermined their post high school departure. “The most frequent reason for leaving church is, in fact, a self-imposed change, ‘I simply wanted a break from church’ (27%),” according to a LifeWay report summarizing the study. “The path toward college and the workforce are also strong reasons for young people to leave church: ‘I moved to college and stopped attending church’ (25%) and ‘work responsibilities prevented me from attending’ (23%).” Following are some similar findings cited by the Youth Transition Network (YTN), a coalition of some of the nation’s largest denominations and ministries that are working together to help reduce the dramatic loss of youth from the church:

- “An Assemblies of God study showed a loss of 66% of their students within one year of high school graduation.”
- “A Southern Baptist transition project estimates an 82% loss of youth within one year of high school graduation.”
- “Fifty to eighty percent of high school students walk away.”
- “As someone who recognizes the importance of an ever-growing faith, especially during the college years, these are staggering statistics,” said Cyndi Forman, campus minister of the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) of Georgia Tech and Emory University. “The statistics are sad, disappointing and dangerous, all at the same time.”
<http://www.onenewsnow.com/Journal/stories.aspx?id=75927>

Such statements should cause alarm and awaken us to our God-given responsibility to steward our own children and then those who are entrusted to us as a family of families. The Barna Group provides the following observation as they seek to track post-high school church engagement.

“When it comes to church engagement, **those who attended Sunday school or other religious programs as children or as teens were much more likely than those without such experiences to attend church and to have an active faith as adults.** For instance, among those who frequently attended such programs as a child, 50% said they attended a worship service in the last week, which is slightly higher than the national average and well ahead of those who rarely or never attended children’s programs. Among those who frequently attended religious programs as teenagers, 58% said they had attended a worship service in the last week. In comparison, less frequent participation as a teenager correlated with less frequent adult participation. (BARNA GROUP, “New Research Explores the Long-Term Effect of Spiritual Activity among Children and Teens,” November 16, 2009).

<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/321-new-research-explores-the-long-term-effect-of-spiritual-activity-among-children-and-teens>

Although it is impossible to know ahead what God would have for your children, this does not negate your responsibility toward them as parents and as a church family. The Proverbs presuppose parents are instructing their children and children are to be listening and obeying this parental instruction (Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 13:1).

“**Hear**, my son, your father's instruction And **do not forsake** your mother's teaching” (Prov. 1:8).

“My son, **observe** the commandment of your father And **do not forsake** the teaching of your mother” (Prov. 6:20).

“A wise son **accepts** his father's [instruction], But a scoffer **does not listen** to [correction]” (Prov. 13:1).

Although we live in troubling times, parents are to protect and lead their children in pursuing God. With this in mind I would like us to consider some basic thoughts as it relates to the parenting of children and transferring of faith.

The Storyline:

Just as God has written into His Story sentinels who are to guard the gate, so also He has placed parents as His means of race proliferation and the resultant responsibility of raising their offspring in “the training and counsel of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

The word discipline, “There are only three examples in the N.T. of **paideia**, old Greek for training a **pai** (boy or girl) and so for the general education and culture of the child. Both papyri and inscriptions give examples of this original and wider sense (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*). (A.T. Robertson on Ephesians 6:4).

The Problem:

Parents have abdicated their biblical responsibility in educating and directing their children toward God. In addition, the world seeks human autonomy. Even in the child, the flesh calls for selfish consumption and no self-control and the devil goads open and persistent rebellion against any and all authority. Every child is a wanted child, and every child is to exist in a context where love is without condition, acceptance is without requirement, forgiveness is without limit and service is without reward. Yet as Christians, individually and as a church corporately, we are failing to build the wall and stand in the gap where breached. This study is a call to arms in rising the next generation of Christians.

Questions:

1. The most basic question is, “Are you patterning a love for Christ and His Church?”
2. Do your kids know you love without condition, accept without requirement, forgive without limit and serve without reward? How might you communicate these truths, this grace to your kids?
3. The most important platform for teaching grace to your kids is living grace toward your spouse. Are you? What does this grace look like in your marriage?
4. What can you do to create an atmosphere of faith within your home?
5. How can you take steps to instruct your child in the ways of God?
6. Is there an area of life that is so overwhelming that you are not spending enough time with your children? How might you correct this? Is it seasonal and temporal?
7. Are you using the shadow to speak eternal truths to your child?
8. What role might you play in your local church to enable and empower parents in their responsibility to raise their children?
9. What role might you play in your local church to teach children? The opportunities are varied. If nothing else, please pray for the parents and children of this fellowship. They need your prayers and your help.
10. It is never too late to show grace to your children no matter how old they are or how far they’ve veered. Today you need to seek God by seeking your child.

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know our responsibility as parents in the raising of our children.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose this sacred trust and seek its fulfillment.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of trusting God to do what is always wise and right.

Outline:

My first point sets the tone for our study.

I. "Directives Are Not Legalistic."

House rules and parental directives are not legalistic. **Legalism is when your love, acceptance, forgiveness and favor are all conditioned on their actions.** It is for this reason I constantly say, "Love without condition, accept without requirement, forgive without limit and serve without reward." Your love, acceptance, forgiveness and service of your children and spouse are unconditionally given. If you make them conditional, then all your house rules and parental directives are promoting legalism. But it is your attitude, not your rules that are promoting the legalism. And if you are a legalist, you will spiritually kill your kids. It is only grace that enables and empowers Christian living.

I do not know who Ruth Peters is but listen to her common sense "biblical" approach to the parent-child relationship.

"Laying Down the Law: The 25 Laws of Parenting to Keep Your Kids on Track, Out of Trouble, and (Pretty Much) Under Control," the most recent book by "Today" show contributor Dr. Ruth Peters. Law #4: Appoint Yourself Benevolent Dictator. Families are not democracies. Kid judgment can be immature, unreasonable, and self-serving. If you're not making the decisions, or are letting the kids buffalo you into doing things their way, against your better judgment, then you are depriving your kids of leadership. It's time for a new form of governance that couldn't be simpler. You have the final vote. Period. End of story.

II. "You Get What You Honor."

Life is lived either in complete chaos where you are the victim, or it is lived intentionally with priorities of importance. Priorities do not guarantee order, but they do enable us to make the kinds of choices that reflect what we deem important. If your first priority is God, then everything flows from that fountain head (and I mean everything). There is a calculated approach to what you do and how you live and order your life from the most mundane to the apparent indispensable.

The most important asset you have as a parent is your personal faith in God as a Trinity and His purpose to be in communion with you through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our current financial recession highlights certain types of assets, yet the one asset that you have that is incorruptible is your position in Christ and God's indwelling within you. This is the one thing that must dominate all other "things." Your relationship with Him is to color every area of your life and it is the one thing you must determine to pass on to your children.

The transferring of faith is solely God's doing, but you (and we as community) have the responsibility of intentionally creating a context where that transfer can happen most readily

and naturally. Proverbs 13:22 speaks to this transfer. Although the immediate context is referencing financial wealth, by way of application this can speak to one's spiritual heritage.

"Good people leave an inheritance to their grandchildren, but the sinner's wealth passes to the godly." (Proverbs 13:22, *New Living Translation*)

If you as a parent do not create the context for this transfer, then you need to put yourself back into the game. This transfer will happen in the context that is most natural for you. It will only happen as you spend time with your children. **The idea that quality time takes the place of quantity is untrue. If you are too busy to spend time with your children, then you are too busy.**

The same is true with reference to taking your kids to church and to church functions. The best way to teach your children the importance of the church in their lives is **by example**. If you love God and His Church, your kids will know this. There is no doubt that some got this wrong. They spent too much time at Church and the kids believed they were less important than Church. This is wrong, but the exception should not negate the principle. Think of whatever activity excites (or enslaves) you. Do you have to tell your kids how much you love reading or movies or fishing or wood working or sports or drinking or etc.? I think not. They know what you love by watching your life. You order your priorities around what you love or honor. The local church is designed by God to be a real part of your Christian experience. Make sure your kids know this.

III. "What You Attract Them With Is What You Attract Them To."

Your child's first impression of God will be what they see in you. If you are excessively rigid or indifferent, this will be the first impressions you teach your children about God. Does God care for them? Do you? Is God out to get them? Are you? Is God compassionate and gracious? Are you? Is God just and for them? Are you? Your kids see all of this in you and it is a primary means of shaping their understanding of God. How do you want them to know and see God? Then be that. Friend, I'm not "preaching" perfection, but . . . **you will not hit what you do not aim at.** Allow them and enable them to see God and His Church as something that is beautiful and worth time and effort.

Often I ask myself a simple question when preparing for Sunday worship, "Why go, what do I pray happens when the people of God are called to corporate worship?" Let me suggest five reasons as to why you need to lead by example in bringing your family to church.

- A. It teaches the importance of what God did in offering up His only begotten Son for the saving of His people. The church is a consequence of God's redemptive activity (Acts 20:28). Your attendance at church speaks to this.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**" (Acts 20:28).

- B. It teaches the importance of intentionally setting aside one day each week for the gathering with God's people for the worship of Him (Gen. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2; Heb. 10:23-25). Your attendance at church speaks to this.

¹ "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. ² By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and **He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.** ³ Then **God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it,** because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Gen. 2:1-3).

¹ "Now concerning **the collection for the saints,** as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. ² **On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save,** as he may prosper, so that no collections **be made when I come**" (1 Cor. 16:1, 2).

²³ "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ **not forsaking our own assembling together,** as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:23-25).

There is a biblical reason as to why we should break from our labor and gather for the worship of God. Those of you who are working without intentional breaks are simply wrong. You must rest one in seven. And I believe this should happen most naturally on Sunday when the geographically defined assembly gathers under a biblical structure and mission. You should bring your kids to church and thus honor this principle.

The following two ideas are built around 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

- C. It teaches the importance of priorities in so far that life is not about you or your family, but God. Your attendance at church speaks to this. Church is a place where you live in community, and because of your investment and presence you become an unintended beneficiary. You go to be a blessing and as a consequence are blessed. **You cannot reverse the order without significant harm to soul and spirit.**

The tragedy of our current culture is the proliferation of churches in geographically distinct areas. Although we consider this a blessing, it is also a liability because churches do not talk with each other and sheep, although in attendance, are not shepherded. Sheep show up and no one knows they're there. Shepherds are negligent as it relates to shepherding, disciple-making and counseling. We must press forward in our desire to fulfill the mission of making disciples of all the nations beginning in our Jerusalem.

- D. It compliments and supplements through various and alternative means what you are endeavoring to teach your children at home (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

¹² “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ **For the body is not one member, but many.** ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ **But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.** ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "**I have no need of you**"; or again the head to the feet, "**I have no need of you.**" ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. **But God has so composed the body,** giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, ²⁵ **so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.** ²⁶ **And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it**" (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

- E. It teaches the importance of the geographically defined assembly with a biblical structure and mission in the protecting and leading of His people (Acts 20:28-35; Heb. 13:15-17). Your attendance at church speaks to this.

²⁸ “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:28-35).

¹⁵ “Through Him then, **let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,** that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing, **for with such sacrifices God is pleased.** ¹⁷ **Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.** Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:15-17).

Although we might have significant disagreement on what these passages mean by the idea of oversight and shepherding and how this plays out in a community of faith, we can all agree

that they mean something. God has crafted His Body in such a way that we need each other. **For people to believe they are bigger than a local church or that somehow they can withdraw from involving themselves in a local church and simply gather with peers in place of a local church is simply foolish.** I hold strongly to the priesthood of each believer and I celebrate the principle of soul liberty, yet neither one of these are in opposition to the local church. You are denying a primary means God has put in place to protect and enable you in your desire to raise your children in the admonition and nurture of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Friend, I believe I speak the truth on these matters and reflect the biblical mandate and means for protecting and enabling our families of children. The next two ideas are warnings or cautions.

IV. "What You Tolerate, You Teach."

I tried to put a positive slant on this, but it is positive only in so far that it stands as a warning or caution. From the words you speak, the things you watch and what you laugh at, where you invest your time and how you treat others, your parents and in particular your spouse, all these communicate. And whether you like it or not, "What you tolerate, you teach." Your children are watching you and listening to you and are being instructed in what is or is not right. How you view your local church and what you do with the responsibility communicates volumes to your children. I find this point frustrating. It is very easy to slip into a rigid type of legalism. Must we always be "on duty"? The short answer is yes. The long answer, however, is a little more complicated. What you do as an adult is significantly different than what can be done by your children. **With maturity comes privilege and with privilege comes responsibility.** There is a difference between you and your children. Yet what happens when you drop your guard? What comes out? What do you most naturally gravitate toward? Every one of us has an inbred weakness that flows out of our old nature. And we must stand guard against this "thing" lest it weakens our defenses and opens us up to significant spiritual failure.

Some of us are so sloppy in thought and action that we have without intent and unknowingly taught our kids the world's agenda. **YOU NEED TO PATTERN WHAT YOU WISH TO PRODUCE.** I will come back to this idea in our next point. Make loving God and His Church a priority, and pray that God will enable your children to see Him. Remember, wherever you place your priorities and what you honor, you are teaching your children. Consider the following two proverbs.

"Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and **the glory of sons is their fathers**" (Prov. 17:6)

"The righteous lead blameless lives; **blessed are their children after them**" (Prov. 20:7, TNIV)

Your children are your most significant investment. Give yourself to the sacred trust.

Like our previous thought this final idea stands as a warning or caution.

V. "What You Doubt, They Will Deny."

Perhaps the flip side of this idea is, "**WHAT YOU PATTERN, YOU WILL PRODUCE.**" If we have no open faith for our children to pattern, the chances of it being reproduced in them will be significantly hindered. Perhaps you've been hurt or neglected by someone or some event at a local church and your heart has become bitter. This bitterness and negativity will be marked by your children and it will produce a world of hurt for you and for your family. Perhaps you've wandered in the dark wilderness of doubt and you've not spoken forcefully and openly about your love for Christ and His church to your children. Friend, it is never too late to repent of this wickedness and to seek the Lord once more. If you do not recognize the need to seek the Lord personally and to attend and commit to a local church, then if not for yourself do it for your children or grandchildren. Do not fail in this sacred trust. As parents we are to provide landmarks whereby our children can live honestly and securely (Prov. 22:28).

"Do not move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set" (Prov. 22:28).

The local church at large and WBC in particular is a place that wishes to intentionally enable parents to parent and to intentionally go about instructing and educating children in who God is, what He has done, and who they are in Him. We believe we are a community, and we believe we have a sacred trust toward those families who align themselves with us. Regardless as to what age we find ourselves at, we are worshippers of God. This is what we are enabling as a family of families.

In making these observations and comments have I abandoned grace and failed to preach Christ? Absolutely not. None of these ideas earn you the proverbial "brownie points" before God. You must preach Christ before your children, and if necessary use words. Be lavish with your love, acceptance, forgiveness and service toward your kids. Love God through your kids. God will not love you any more or less for **your adherence to or abandonment of** these ideas. However, you would be foolish to dismiss these thoughts.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

Even in the face of our unadulterated pursuit of Him our children can still deviate from the path we have trod. **There are no ironclad guarantees when it comes to parenting.** We have misapplied Proverbs 22:6.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

God will have His way in the life of His people with or without your consent or involvement, but . . . God fully expects you to do what He commands and will hold you responsible in this stewardship. And despite the abundance of commands found throughout the Old and New Testament and as complicated as this might initial appear there is only one you need to lay hold of.

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? ³⁷ And He said to him, "**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.**" ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets'" (Matt. 22:36-40).

Your stewardship of your family and as a church family of families flows from your intentional pursuit of God above all else. From this singular vertical pursuit flows the horizontal fruit of loving your neighbor (i.e. those closest to you, your spouse, your children, your extended families, and your church). **Faith transfer takes place in the context of loving relationships.** The most important relationship you have after God is with your spouse and your children. Inside that context, seek God and pray that His love will flow within you to overflow and engulf those within your immediate circle of influence. May the peace of God rest upon you. May you continue to submit yourself humbly before Him as He works with persistency His will in and through you, In Jesus Name, Amen.

1. If you are not parenting your kids from a perspective of grace, confess it, repent from it and start. It is never too late.
2. If you are not relating to your spouse from a perspective of grace, confess it, repent from it and start. It is never too late.
3. Talk to your kids and open up lines of communication. Involve yourself in their lives. Create a context for communication. Preach Christ and if necessary use words.
4. The most basic question is, "Are you patterning a love for Christ and His Church?"
5. Do your kids know you love without condition, accept without requirement, forgive without limit and serve without reward? How might you communicate these truths, this grace to your kids?
6. The most important platform for teaching grace to your kids is living grace toward your spouse. Are you? What does this grace look like in your marriage?
7. What can you do to create an atmosphere of faith within your home?
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