

## **Building a Spiritual Heritage for our Children**

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2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith Series

2 Timothy 1:1-5

One of the remarkable things about Christianity is how the Christian faith is passed along from person to person, from generation to generation, like links in a chain. I have found that many Christians don't seem to grasp this. Many Christians think of themselves as self-made men or women, or they think their faith is simply a product of God's action in their lives utterly apart from other people.

Christian, do you realize that the existence of your faith is not only a miracle of God, but also the result of the faithfulness of hundreds of thousands of Christians over the past twenty centuries? It is absolutely the case that we are all standing on the shoulders of generations of prior Christians. If you are a follower of Christ today, how is it that you came to believe in Christ? It's likely someone shared his or her faith with you – a parent, a spouse, a grandparent, a friend or a pastor. And how is it that *that* person came to believe? Well, likely through their parents, spouses, friends or pastors. And so on down through the generations.

It is impossible to think of a person that came to faith utterly apart from any other human intervention whatsoever. I imagine a person in a motel room 1500 miles away from home. They are depressed. Their life is falling apart. Their marriage may be on its last legs. Their kids are abusing drugs. They are alienated from their families, they hate their job, nothing in their life is working. This person opens up the end table by their bed and they find a Gideon's Bible. This person is at the end of their rope.

In the front flap of the Gideon's Bible they read a series of Bible verses about how to start a relationship with God. They read John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

They read Romans 6:23:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

They read Romans 10:9–10:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your

heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

In desperation, that person kneels down beside their bed and prays the prayer that they find in the Gideon's Bible. They just read the prayer aloud. There is no one else in the room. It's a prayer of confession of sin; it's a prayer of surrender to God; it's a prayer of invitation for Christ to come and live inside their hearts. They suddenly feel the presence of God for the first time in their life. They feel, for the first time in a long time, a sense of peace. They feel the weight of their sin and guilt rolling off of them. Hope springs up in their hearts in a motel room 1500 miles from home.

Do you realize how many people participate in the conversion of a solitary woman or man alone in a motel room? Someone had to place that Gideon's Bible in the room. Someone raised funds for the Bible's printing. Someone gave money so that the Bible would be distributed. Manuscripts of the Bible were studied, preserved, copied and translated by thousands of people so that that man or woman could read the Bible in his or her own language.

Every conversion is one more link in a chain that stretches across twenty centuries and thousands of miles and millions of martyrs, monks, pastors, and parents – a chain that eventually goes back all the way to Christ and the apostles and a chain that reaches forward all the way to you.

The only question, if you are a follower of Christ, is whether you are going to participate in adding one more link in the chain. Will you pass along the faith to a friend, or to a relative, to a child? Will the chain continue to be built through you to another person, or will this chain that stretches back 20 centuries and made its way all the way to you, be broken with you?

Let me share with you a story of the chain of faith that has been going on in one famous family for generations. Many of you are familiar with the name Guinness, from the Guinness Book of World Records. The Guinness Family, whose money has been made for over 200 years from brewing some of the most widely distributed beer in the world, a family of Irish brewers, also contains within it a long and distinguished line of Christians.

You can go back to the 1870's when a man named Grattan Guinness began a school to train missionaries that would require no fees. He started the school in the east end of London, a very poor, tough neighborhood in those days. He thought if the students couldn't handle the east end of London, they are not going to be able to handle China or India. He wanted a school that an average working man or servant girl could go to, to be trained for world missions without having to worry about whether or not they could afford to pay.

Well, Grattan's own children went into missions. Four of his kids served on the mission field in Africa and China. One of his daughters ended up marrying the son of the famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor. Grattan's grandson followed his missionary parents to the mission field in China. In fact, his grandson was arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese during the Japanese occupation of China in WWII. Grattan's great-grandson is a man named Os Guinness, who became a world famous Christian defender of the faith.

Now, there are great-great grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren of Grattan's serving Christ around the world. I had the privilege of spending some time with one of Grattan's great-grandsons, who is a wonderful Anglican pastor in the south of England, and his wife who is a Messianic Jewish woman, and a prolific writer of books helping Jewish people, especially Jewish women come to faith in Christ.

Six generations of Christians, just since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. What an extraordinary impact this one family of Irish beer brewers has had on the world – the chain of faith.

I'm going to start a new series in this New Year from the New Testament book of 2 Timothy. I've felt for the last few months the Holy Spirit pressing me to communicate to you how much God wants each of his sons and daughters to participate in the extraordinary privilege of passing on the faith to others. Today, what I'm going to do is begin this series where the apostle Paul begins. I want to talk about passing on the faith to our children. I've called today's talk, "Building a Spiritual Heritage for Our Children." Let's pray.

### **2 Timothy 1:1-5**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Over the next few months we are going to be studying the book of 2 Timothy together. And then, before Easter this year, I want to return to the gospel of John and finish that book that we started probably about a year ago. We are going to be studying John's discussion of the death and resurrection of Christ, just in time for Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion," which is coming out at the end of February.

2 Timothy is part of a group of three letters. 1 Timothy and Titus are the other two letters that have, at least since the early 1700's, been called "the pastoral

epistles” or “pastoral letters.” The title “pastoral letters” refers to the fact that these letters were addressed to individuals who were commissioned to care for and pastor churches. And as you read through 1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy, you see Paul exhorting Timothy and Titus to do the work of pastoring, to raise up other leaders, to teach healthy doctrine, to combat doctrinal error that was creeping into the church, and to extend the kingdom to other people.

Paul, in 2 Timothy, exhorts Timothy to do the work of pastoring, and in particular, to pass along the Christian faith that Timothy had received from Paul to others. Now, some commentaries will say that the main message of 2 Timothy is to guard the gospel, that Timothy is exhorted to protect and defend and preserve the gospel against false teaching that was creeping into the Ephesian church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Certainly, guarding and protecting, defending the gospel, combating falsehood is a part of the message of 2 Timothy. But it is only a part.

The overall purpose of 2 Timothy is to extend, to pass along, and to share the gospel, to continue building the chain of faith from one generation to another. It is like football. It is not enough to have a great defense, which can hold the other team to very few points. The goal of football is to score at least one more point than your opponent. You’ve got to put the ball across the goal line.

And this is a really important spiritual lesson for us. In every realm of our Christian lives, are we basically playing defense, holding on to what we have received, trying to protect and preserve, or guard? Or are we actually involved in extending the kingdom? Let me press out this distinction for just a moment - the distinction between simply defending or protecting, and extending, influencing, or changing the environment around us.

We face the crossroads of defending or extending in our own church’s history. This church was birthed as an independent church. We did not have a denominational tie. And in 1985 our church was considering being adopted into a larger church movement. The two movements that we were looking at the most closely were the Vineyard movement on the one hand, and another church movement on the other. This other church movement had leaders that had great character. The other church movement was stable. It was mature. But its basic orientation toward the world was defensive. In fact, the church movement used a metaphor to describe its existence over and over again. The metaphor was that of a bulwark.

I don’t know if you know what a bulwark is, but it is a breakwater. It is a series of walls put out in the ocean to protect a beach from erosion. And so this particular Christian movement that we were looking at saw that its main job was to protect existing Christians from being eroded by the world and by the influence of the world.

Well, we were also looking at the Vineyard. And the Vineyard was way more unstable than this other church movement. They were a little bit like a roller coaster. They were pushing the borders. Their major concern was extending the kingdom. They were more open, more risk-taking, more challenging and stretching to people's faith.

I had a conversation with one of our leaders back in the mid-1980's and I said to him, "You know, if we joined that first movement, the bulwark movement, then I can't serve as our senior pastor, because that is not what God has called me to do, simply to defend and protect and guard. That's part of it, but I don't want to spend my life being a bulwark. I want to spend my life being a bulldozer. I want to see the church change the landscape and environment around it. As a result of our church's existence in the community, I want the community to be different. I want to see thousands and thousands of lives changed and impacted because our church exists. So, I'm not interested in being a bulwark. I'm interested in being a bulldozer."

We classify churches. Some churches are really just defending, they're not extending, not influencing.

This distinction runs into our whole orientation of life. Jesus talks about that in a famous parable called "The Parable of the Talents." A wealthy man distributes talents to three different people. One of the men takes a defensive orientation to life. The talent that he's been given, which is sum of money, he buries in the ground. He's afraid of losing what he's got. His orientation toward life is that of guarding, protecting, and preserving. The other two men, who are given sums of money, invest their money. They take a risk and their money grows.

The question, of course, that is posed to us through the parable is, what is your orientation toward life? Is it basically protective and defensive, driven mainly by fear of loss? Or is your orientation toward life one of risk-taking? Do you desire to extend the influence of the kingdom toward others, even if occasionally you might blow it? Even if occasionally someone might be offended, or you don't get it right?

And this distinction of defending or extending can be seen in people's parenting styles. Parents, is your major goal in parenting to simply keep your kids from being influenced by the world? See, the basic orientation of your parenting and family life is a defensive one. You are protecting, guarding and preserving your kids. You are putting them behind a bulwark. Again, that is certainly part of the role of parenting, to discern what sort of media ought to be allowed in your home, to discern whom your kids friends should be, to discern what they're learning in school. Defending is a great part of what you are doing. But is that your basic orientation?

Or have you taken a different fork in the road and said while this may involve some risk, I want to train my children to be extenders of the kingdom. We encourage our kids to reach out to other kids, to befriend kids that may not have it all together. We encourage our kids to take some risks, to stretch, to be challenged.

Again, all churches, all people, all parents need both. We need to defend and we need to extend. But what is your basic orientation?

Paul's basic orientation was extension, influence. Here's what we read:

### **2 Timothy 1:1-2**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dear son: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here in verse 2 the apostle Paul calls Timothy "my dear son." And in 1 Timothy 1:2, he writes to Timothy: "My true son in the faith." Paul uses the phrase "my son" in 2 Timothy 2:1, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Timothy was not just part of Paul's inner circle. Paul had a relationship with Timothy that was deeply affectionate.

Apparently, when Paul met Timothy on Paul's second missionary journey, Timothy was already a follower of Christ. If you look back with me at Acts 16:1-2, we read:

### **Acts 16:1-2**

He, that is Paul, came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

It's possible that Timothy was converted during Paul's first missionary journey so that Timothy became a spiritual son of the apostle Paul through Paul's preaching. It is also possible that his grandmother and his mother, who were converted by Paul during Paul's first missionary tour, led Timothy to faith. Timothy's sonship to Paul then would be a matter of Paul's deep love and concern for this younger man, Timothy.

Paul's relationship with Timothy was unique. There is a father-son relationship to Timothy that we see in many of Paul's writings. I just want to show you one other example, though it's everywhere. In Philippians 2:19 we read:

### **Philippians 2:19**

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who

takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Timothy became a gifted evangelist and teacher. And Paul frequently leaves Timothy behind to help new converts, who have been saved under Paul's ministry, to get grounded in the faith. For example, he has Timothy go to the city of Thessalonica to disciple the new believers there. Likewise, he sends him to Philippi to train up the new believers there. Timothy is something of a troubleshooter for Paul. Paul sends Timothy to Corinth to straighten things out.

And in the Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy, the apostle Paul sends his spiritual son, Timothy, to Ephesus to straighten out the mess that was going on in the Ephesian church. So we read in 1 Timothy 1:3:

### **1 Timothy 1:3**

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work, which is by faith.

Timothy in the Pastoral Epistles is sent into a tough situation in Ephesus. Radical teachers are spreading their teachings to various house churches that Paul planted in Ephesus. Their teaching seems to have been a mix of Jewish mythology and Greek philosophy. But the false teaching is being taught by men and is being carried by wealthy women, who are spreading it like the flu from church to church. These women are infecting other women throughout Ephesus and whole churches are being unsettled by the false teachings. Paul calls these false teaching doctrines of demons.

So Timothy is sent to straighten out the Ephesian church and bring discipline and order to the house churches. Paul's ultimate goal is to make sure that the gospel is not only defended, but also extended to other people and to the next generation.

Now, here's the question, when people face great opposition, when they are in tough or challenging situations, what will keep them going? When someone faces opposition, what will cause him or her to continue to extend the faith? Here's what we read in 2 Timothy 1:3-6:

### **2 Timothy 1:3-6**

I thank God, whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your

mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in also in you. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Paul says there are four acts of remembrance that will keep Timothy going even in the face of great opposition. The first thing is Paul remembers his friend in prayer. Verse 3:

**2 Timothy 1:3**

I thank God, whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in prayer.

The second thing is the remembrance of Timothy's genuine faith. Verses 4-5a:

**2 Timothy 1:4-5a**

Recalling your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith.

The third thing is the remembrance of Timothy's spiritual heritage. Verse 5:

**2 Timothy 1:5**

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in you also.

And the fourth thing is a remembrance of the power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 6:

**2 Timothy 1:6**

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Let's take these up in turn, at least the first three - the remembrance of a person in prayer. Paul says:

I thank God, whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

We all have people in our circles who we love, but whose needs go way beyond our resources. Maybe you know someone who is in the hospital, or who is facing a severe medical crisis. You love them and you desire that they be healed and that their faith not be collapsed under the weight of the trial they are facing. But you know that you cannot personally heal them. You know that you cannot personally put faith in their hearts as they go through this time of great difficulty. So how is it when we love someone that we can make up the gap between what we want for them, and the resources that we have.



Here's one thing that you can do for a person in the hospital. You can pray. Every time you remember them, you can pray for them.

If you have a friend, who is a missionary and your friend is facing pressure from a foreign government, or new converts who have come to faith under this missionary's ministry are being hounded by the government. The police are following the missionary around. Maybe the country has passed harsh anti-conversion laws. What can you do for missionaries halfway around the world? One of our missionaries, Andy Saperstein, has been very ill battling colitis. Well, one of the main things you can do is pray for them. With every remembrance of that person, you can pray.

You have a loved one or a friend has a loved one who is in Iraq right now in the military. Whenever you think about the Iraqi War, you want your loved one, or your friend's loved one to be kept safe, to be preserved from harm. But they are halfway around the world. What can you do for them? You can pray.

You have another friend, who is thinking about getting divorced. Their marriage has been struggling for years. They have a couple of kids. You love them. You talk with them about getting help, but they feel they've done everything they can do. Counseling hasn't worked. There are too many problems. It looks like they are getting ready to throw in the towel. You are concerned about their kids. You are concerned about them giving up on God. You are concerned about them deliberately disobeying the clear Word of God, and you know that that is going to result in harm for them, and harm for their kids. You hate seeing the enemy get another victory by having another family break up. What can you do when folks you love are threatening divorce, or separation? You can pray.

Pray for humility for the husband and the wife. Pray for hope to emerge supernaturally in their hearts. Pray for softness. Every time you remember them, pray.

With your kids – maybe you have a child that is going off the rails. You discipline. You encourage. You nag. You confront, but your child persists in doing their own thing, which you know is not God's thing. What can you do with a willful, rebellious child? Parents, pray. Pray for the compliant, well-behaved child.

Nothing is more important, there is no act of love that is more significant, no gift of love that is more significant from one human being to another than that you pray for them. Jesus tells us in Luke 18 that we should always pray and never give up.

If someone in your circle is facing opposition too great for them, remember to pray constantly. That's what Paul does for Timothy. It says in 2 Timothy 1:3:

**2 Timothy 1:3**

I thank God, whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

The second thing Paul says to a person who is facing a great opposition, a great challenge is that you need to remember your Christian faith. Verses 4-5a:

**2 Timothy 1:4-5a**

Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith.

It is unclear what the circumstances were in which Paul saw Timothy's tears. I certainly think of that scene in Ephesus in the book of Acts where elders from the church in Ephesus embraced Paul and wept as Paul was departing. Timothy's tears are a sign of the genuineness of his faith. Sometimes in trials a person can get so spun around that they forget who they are and they forget what God has done for them. They say, "I don't think I can face this cancer." "I don't feel like I can handle being unemployed." "I don't think I can confront my dad about his abuse." "I don't believe I can overcome this addiction."

What do you do? When a person is facing something they think is too big for them? Remind them of God's work in their life. Be like Paul. Remind them that they have a sincere faith. God has done something in your life, friend, there has been a miracle. You know how the enemy can sometimes come along to you and tell you in the midst of a great difficulty that nothing is really changed. Oh sure, you prayed that prayer to receive Christ. You were happy for a little while, but look at yourself and your circumstances. Nothing has really changed. You are the same depressed, anxious person you always were. Then the enemy says, "You have the same problems. Look at you. You have the same explosive anger, the same lust, the same pride that you had before you came to Christ. You haven't changed."

Folks constantly need reminders from friends when they are in crisis that you are a Christian. Friend, you are connected to Christ. You are a new creation. You can make a difficult decision. You don't have to be controlled by fear or lust, or by self-pity or doubt.

Timothy, you have a sincere faith demonstrated by the tears you shed when we had to separate from each other. Timothy, you are not just a washed out, lukewarm second generation Christian. I see in you passion for Christ that burns strongly. I know that the miracle of the new birth has been worked in your life. You are born again Timothy. You are different. He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world. You can overcome the oppositions you are facing in Ephesus.

Paul says, "I remember you in prayer. I remind you of your sincere faith. And let me remind you as well, of your spiritual heritage." Verse 3:

### **2 Timothy 1:3**

I thank God whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience...

And verse 5:

### **2 Timothy 1:5**

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Paul speaks of his own spiritual heritage and then he reminds Timothy of his own spiritual heritage.

You know, kids today face so many obstacles relationally, educationally, and spiritually. Gone are the days when a Christian parent can confidently send their kids off to school believing that the school will support the parents' values and beliefs. Sometimes parents face a pitched battle with the school concerning what the school is introducing to their children. Gone are the days when a Christian parent can confidently allow their child to attend a sleepover event, or a party at a classmate's house trusting that the classmate's parents are not only going to be there, but that they are going to support the parents' values.

Kids are facing enormous challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Let me just share with you some statistics.

Educationally, you know the Columbus Public Schools has been put on academic watch, which is just step up from the lowest rating, which is academic emergency.

- Only 45% of Columbus 4<sup>th</sup> graders passed their 4<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency tests in reading.
- Only 39% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders passed their 6<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency test in reading.
- The state requirement for both is 75%.
- The graduation rate for Columbus is 59%. The state requirement is 90%.

Suburban School Districts, in general, do much better. But in America:

- American 8<sup>th</sup> grade students ranked 21<sup>st</sup> out of 25 industrialized nations in mathematics.
- Children age 2-7 watch an average of 25 hours of TV a week.
- Between the ages of 8-13, children spend 48 hours per week on some form of entertainment – TV, the Internet, video games, etc.
- 1 out of 10 teenagers have had intercourse by age 13.
- 25% of 17 year olds smoke daily.
- Family life – ¼ of all children currently live with a single parent.

- 50% of all kids will at some point before age 18 live with only one parent.

You look at the stats, and according to George Barna, the premier demographer of religion in America, what is lost for children in America today is innocence, civility, patience, joy and trust.

So how do we as Christian parents in America today, given all the obstacles, offer our kids a spiritual heritage? How do we continue to build the chain of faith to the next generation, so that 20 centuries of Christianity doesn't end with us, but that there is another link in the chain? And as I go through these quickly, I want to say that there are no formulas for raising kids. The Bible offers us general guidelines. It offers us principles. It offers us wisdom. It doesn't offer us guarantees. Children can rebel for a season, sometimes for years. Kids do have free will, just like adults do. Children can choose to do right. Children can choose to do wrong.

But parents can create a spiritual environment. They can give their kids a spiritual heritage so that if rebellion does occur, it is highly likely that the child will one day return to Christ. Parents can build a foundation in a child's life so that a child has to fight incredibly hard to keep resisting what they've been taught. See, I believe that a parent can put a center of gravity in a child's life. Parents can place an anchor that will naturally and often pull a child back, even if there is a season of willful rebellion.

I view parenting like one of those punching bears that you might have had as a child. It has a weight on the bottom. You hit the bear in the head and even though it falls over, it eventually comes back up. Strong forces – peer pressure, boyfriends, girlfriends, media, cultural forces, a child's own rebellion – strong forces can push the child down for a while. But if there is a center of gravity in the child's life, a spiritual weight, then I believe it is highly likely that the child will stand back up, come back to Christ—like the prodigal son with the father.

How do we put a center of gravity in a child? First of all, we parents need to see that we are primarily responsible to build a spiritual heritage in our child's life. We can't pass this job off to the church, or to children's ministry, or to Christian schools. Dad, you are primarily responsible to pass along the Christian faith to your kids. Mom, it is your job to pass along the Christian faith to your kids.

And we may not just throw up our hands and say, "Oh well, the world is too strong. What can I do?" Mom, Dad, you are still the most influential person in your child's life. It may not seem like it, but you are the 900 lb. gorilla that your child has to deal with.

And so, you need to prioritize your children's spiritual welfare above everything else in parenting your kids. Let's shoot straight with each other. Many of us as parents are thrilled if our kids are getting straight A's, or if they have a lead in the

play or are starting on a varsity team, or get into a great college. But mom, dad, you ought to be more thrilled if you have a child that prays, a child that shows spiritual interest in the Bible, a child that memorizes scripture. You ought to be more thrilled when you see good, Christian character coming out of your child, or when your child tells the truth and makes the decision to stand up for God and his will in the world, rather than succumb to peer pressure.

So let me ask you a personal question. Parents, be honest. Is your number one priority in your child's life that they grow up to be a disciple of Christ? Parents, do you believe the promise in Matthew 6:33, which says:

**Matthew 6:33**

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Do you believe that promise for your child? Here's a New Year's resolution as parents, I will put my kids' spiritual well being above everything else in my parenting. I will seek first the kingdom in my child's life before sports, and before academic excellence.

Here's a third thing. You know, it is never too early to start placing a spiritual center of gravity in your children. Remember, it is way harder to unlearn habits than it is to learn them to begin with. How foolish are parents who wait until their kids are 5-10 years old or are teens to start praying with their kids, or reading to them from the Bible. Parents, those of you who are first generation Christians, those of you who did not grow up in Christ-centered homes, have you not seen in your own life how difficult it is to think Christianly, to respond to pressure as a Christian should, to respond to disappointment with faith. Have you not seen in your own life how difficult it is to respond as a Christian when you have a lifetime of habits of responding as a non-Christian?

George Barna tells us that

- 60% of all decisions for Christ are made before a child is 18 years old.

One Catholic Bishop said many years ago, "Allow me to educate a child, and I will guarantee that they will be Catholic for life."

Parents, your kids are never too young to introduce them to Christ. Parents, your kids are never too young to learn to serve. Here's an idea. Serve together as a family. As a New Year's resolution why not say that once a month or every other month, we as a family are going to go down to Vineyard's Food Pantry on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue on Saturday morning to serve. Or once a month I'm going to pick up one of those purple bags in the lobby and with my children, I'm going to fill it with food and we're going to carry it back to the church so that a hungry person has

something to eat. I'm going to teach my children from the time they get an allowance to tithe on that allowance.

And you know, building a spiritual heritage for your kids is a long-term process. It is not the product of one conversation or one prayer. It is the daily accumulation of experiences and conversations; it is modeling. In fact, I believe our example, as a parent is way more important than what you or I say. We cannot, as parents have a "do as I say, but not as I do" attitude. "Smoking is bad for you, son, don't smoke" while you have a cigarette in your mouth. "Don't watch junk on TV," but mom or dad can watch anything. "Don't gossip," while mom and dad run down their extended family, church members, or friends over supper.

If we want our kids to pray, do they see you regularly praying? If we want our kids to read the Bible, do they wake up and see us reading your Bible in the morning? If we want our children to confess sin, do we confess sin to them?

This is a long-term job. And mostly it's modeling.

Fifth, never think that because you are a single parent, because you are a mom or dad raising your kids alone, or your husband or wife is spiritually not on the same page as you are, and doesn't support your desire to raise your kids for Christ – never think that you can't on your own, single parents, unequally yoked spouse, build a spiritual heritage in your kids. Remember, Timothy's mother was married to an unbelieving man, but she was able to pass along the faith to her son.

There is a great example in church history of a woman named Monica married to an unbeliever. This non-believing father raised his son to pursue Roman culture. His son was sexually promiscuous. He partied and had no real interest in the Christian faith. But mom kept praying for him. Mom kept sharing her faith with him. Mom kept arranging appointments for him to meet with thoughtful Christians and God heard mom's prayers. Monica's son was radically converted. And the boy that this woman, Monica, raised is someone we know as St. Augustine, the most influential church leader in the entire medieval church.

Single mom, single dad, and unequally yoked spouse, church history is filled with examples of individual parents who gave their kids a great spiritual heritage.

And the church has a role in helping you build a spiritual heritage. Listen, the church's primary job is to support you as parents. You are primarily responsible for building the heritage, but the church can help you by supporting you, by giving you resources, by assisting you, and by encouraging you. We try to do this by primarily discipling you through our worship services, through small groups, through training center, so that you can be a good model for your children. But we more directly support you by offering you opportunities to build a spiritual heritage for your kids.

I'm really personally burdened for parents. I think we face such a hard job today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in raising kids for Christ. Marlene and I certainly have faced challenges in our own home. Many of you are facing great challenges in your home. As Marlene and I have prayed over the last several months, we feel led by God to start a support group for parents of young adults, whose child, at least for this period of time, could be considered prodigal. You've got a young adult who has turned away from Christ, and parent you feel the need for support, in getting together with a group of other parents who understand how you feel, and pray with you and you can pray with them. I feel the need for resourcing and assisting you as parents. Marlene and I are starting a parenting group in February. You can watch in your bulletin for that group. It will be on our website.

And of course, a great way that we as a church support your role as parents is through our children's ministry. You know, children's ministry works not only in helping kids get connected to Christ, but children's ministry has been used for kids to connect their parents to church.

One couple was checking out different churches. They came here a few times and went to some other churches. They decided to come back here. Their preschooler jumped out of the car in the parking lot, opened up his arms, and said, "Finally, we came back to *my* church!" Now they are members here.

A single dad was awakened by his three year old jumping on his bed on Sunday morning telling him, "Daddy, daddy, its time to get up and go to church."

A single mom wasn't feeling well. She thought she'd skip church services. Her two grade school kids dragged her out of bed and said, "Mom, we've got to go to church."

Let me close with a story. You say, "Well, what impact does children's ministry really have on children?"

There was a great evangelist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century named D.L. Moody. Thousands of people came to Christ under his ministry. D.L. Moody led a man named Wilbur Chapman to the Lord. Wilbur Chapman became a great evangelist with generations succeeding Moody. And while Wilbur Chapman was preaching in Chicago, a professional ballplayer named Billy Sunday went to one of Wilbur Chapman's meetings.

And Billy Sunday gave his life to Christ. He played baseball for two more years and then became a world famous evangelist. He set up tent meetings all across the country. At one of Billy Sunday's meetings, a man named Mordecai Hamm accepted Christ.

And Hamm became a great evangelist in the Southeast. He ministered to large crowds in Southern states. In the 1930's, there was a young man in one of those crowds who gave his life to Christ. That young man's name was Billy Graham.

From D.L. Moody, to Wilbur Chapman, to Billy Sunday, to Mordecai Hamm, to Billy Graham – now, as Paul Harvey, “Here’s the rest of the story...”

Do you know how this chain of faith started? It started with a children's ministry worker. A Sunday School teacher in Boston wanted to make sure that every young person in his Sunday School really knew Christ as his Savior. And so while D.L. Moody was a teenager working in a shoe store in Boston, his Sunday School teacher, whose name was Edward Kimball, went back in the stockroom where the young boy, D.L. Moody was working. Kimball shared the gospel with him. He and Moody knelt down right there in that shoe store and Moody received Christ. Edward Kimball was not a world-famous evangelist. But as a result of his ministry as a Sunday School teacher, tens of millions of people over the next six generations have come to faith in Christ.

You have no idea what kind of impact you can have on the history of this world when you decide to invest in the life a child. In some ways, friends, it may be no greater good that you will ever do in this world than building a spiritual heritage in a child or for your children. Pass along the faith to a child. Let's pray.



## **Building a Spiritual Heritage for our Children**

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Rich Nathan

January 10-11, 2004

2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith Series

2 Timothy 1:1-5

### **I. The Chain Of Faith**

### **II. The Message Of Influence**

### **III. The Importance Of Reminders**

A. The Remembrance Of A Person In Prayer (2 Timothy 1:3)

B. The Remembrance Of A Person's Faith (2 Timothy 1:4,5)

C. The Remembrance Of A Person's Upbringing (2 Timothy 1:5)

How To Build A Spiritual Heritage For Your Kids:

1. There Will Be Obstacles!
2. Parents, You Are Primarily Responsible!
3. Prioritize Your Children's Spiritual Welfare Above All Else!
4. It Is Never Too Early To Start!
5. Stay At It For The Long Haul!
6. Single Parents, You Can Do It!
7. The Church Has A Role!