

Helping our children live gospel-centered lives

This week I was discussing with one of our volunteers the need to change one of the curriculum programs we use in our children's ministry. She accurately articulated the issue:

"Some of these lessons teach our children to be good little kids and then they grow up to find out they're not good after all." She explained it well.

Teaching our children the Bible is not about giving them rules for life. That's what the Law did in the Old Testament, and God's people demonstrated over and over that they couldn't live by it. Neither can we. And neither can our children.



"Living by the Gospel" recognizes who we are in Christ (sinners who by faith have trusted God to take the righteousness of Christ and impute it to us as He changes us to live godly lives). Apart from the work of God in our lives we are a mess. While others may blow up buildings and murder innocents and steal millions, we are just as guilty and vile. Our sins are just more "respectable" and "socially acceptable."

The Bible describes as "the fruit of the spirit" (think of "fruit" as the "crop the Holy Spirit produces in us") these qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," the exact things we want to see in our children's lives! But notice that these aren't the result of rules or commands or spankings or time-outs. They are the result of the Holy Spirit changing a life.

While your child *will* need some rules, some dos and don'ts, and a few "you'd better nots," these only serve as a *temporary* protection against immediate harm. True transformation that lasts a lifetime is the result of a person having a deep, personal relationship with God and surrendering to His love.

Therefore, the secret to an obedient child is not one who knows the rules; it's one who knows God.

Now if this sounds a little deep for a little kid, remember that Jesus taught that we must *all* become like children to be a part of God's kingdom.

That means we simply trust, simply believe, simply love, simply follow.

So how can that happen? First, I would encourage you to examine your own relationship with God. It's not just coming to church or being in a small group or even being a worker at church. It's having a deep, personal relationship of love and submission to God and absolute trust in Him.

That's our assignment. We are here to help your family and I hope you will let us do that. We cannot lead our children closer to God than we are ourselves. It must all begin with our God and our hearts. *—Herb Owen*

Next Sunday

All children's nurseries and children's classes/kids worship services will meet on the regular schedule. Some will have substitute teachers. If you can, stop by the Nursery and see if they'll need any extra help on December 26.

B.L.A.S.T.

It's our mid-week club program for grades 1-6 and it begins again on January 5. Children coming for the first time and all fourth through sixth graders should register at our website at straightstreet.net. You may do this beginning next Sunday.

What about you?

From 7:45-8:30pm each Wednesday Cherrydale adults teach various electives to our children. These are hobbies and interests that you enjoy anyway. Typical electives could be cooking, sewing, chess club, jewelry making, sports (we'd use the gym), photography, Legos, building models, babysitting, and so on. We are currently staffing the various months for 2011 and we need more great parents to help. If you'd like to know more, call Marilyn Owen at (703) 254-8304.

Straight Street Singers

It's our kids choir that rehearses each Wednesday from 6:30-7:00pm. We also rehearse occasionally on Sunday afternoon, and on Presidents Day, Monday February 21, 2011 (no school that day) we will have an all-day choir camp full of fun and rehearsal for our next musical to be presented Sunday evening, March 20. This will be an original musical Pastor Herb Owen is writing for our own Cherrydale kids. We especially encourage our fifth and sixth graders to be a part, as they would likely have many of the leads in the musical. Rehearsals begin Wednesday, January 5.

Kids Bibles still available

We still have a few of the illustrated Bibles available for your children. They make great Christmas gifts. The ones we still have are on display on the table outside Pastor Herb's office on the third floor near Straight Street Station.

*"We are perishing for want of wonder,
not for a want of wonders."*

- ENGLISH WRITER G. K. CHESTERTON

How we view our children determines how we disciple them

Theo rattles off reasons his father should ignore his poor grades: “Dad, you’re a doctor and mom’s a lawyer, and you’re both successful in everything, and that’s great! But maybe I was born to be a regular person and have a regular life. So rather than feeling disappointed because I’m not like you, maybe you should accept who I am and love me anyway.” After a long pause, Dr. Huxtable shoots back, “Theo . . . **that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard in my life!** No wonder you get D’s in everything.”

That scene from *The Cosby Show* provides a rare moment of clarity in today’s “parenting according to Oprah” world. And it illustrates a crucial truth in discipleship children:

How we **view** our children determines how we **disciple** our children.

The Bible Speaks of Children in Two Categories

1. Children come into the world as sinners (Gen. 8:21; Ps. 58:3).

This isn’t news to many of us, but the most important things to remember are the easiest things to forget.

Failing to view our children as natural-born sinners leads to some of the dumbest approaches to parenting you’ve ever heard. And if we’re honest, we’re all guilty of them on occasion. We often think that if we let our kids do that or don’t let our kids do this, we’ll ruin them. The truth is that kids come into the world already “lost and ruined by the fall.”

How we view our children determines how we disciple our children.

2. Children come into the world as gifts and image-bearers.

Psalms 127:3 invites us to **treasure children as a gift**. Children don’t seem like a treasure when their soiled diaper gives us whiplash or when they try to flush Dora down the toilet. But never forget that children are a gift from God.

Genesis 1:27 reminds us that **children are created in God’s image**. Regardless of age, handicap, or ethnicity, all human life is intrinsically valuable because it’s made in God’s image. Depraved beings are still infinitely valuable beings. To quote the great theologian Dr. Seuss, “A person’s a person no matter how small!” To quote C. S. Lewis, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”

Parents must view their children as gifts from God made in his image.

Two Applications of These Two Categories

Think of how these categories should be worked out in your home. Here are two examples from ours.

1. Random Moments

“Guess what, Katherine?”

“What?”

“Did you know you’re special to mom and dad? Do you know why? Because God gave you to mommy and daddy as a gift to care for and love! Do you know why else you are special?”

“Why?”

“Because you are made in God’s image and that makes you very valuable.”

In this way, we’re trying to teach our kids to **locate their significance outside of themselves**, in the God who made them and sent his Son to take away sins.

2. Teachable Moments

“Carson, do you know why you were fussing in the store?” Blank stare.

“Did you think you needed that toy to make you happy?” “Yes.”

“Guess what the Bible calls that, buddy?”

“What?”

“The Bible calls that covetousness. Covetousness is when we love something more than God. When you were fussing in the store, you were saying that you needed that toy more than God. And you know why you said that?” “Why?”

“Because you have a sinful heart that loves things more than God. We need to call out to God and ask Him to have mercy on your sinful heart.”

In this way, we want to **show them the horror of their sinful condition and the hope and mercy of the all-satisfying God**.

The Danger of Ignoring These Two Categories

In ignoring such biblical categories, we veer off into things like:

- **moralistic behaviorism** (do the right things);
- **Christianized determinism** (give them the right things—friends, music, places, catechism, education, etc.); or
- **grace-based libertarianism** (let them do anything).

The problem with all of these is that none has much need for a bloody cross or an empty tomb.

Ignorance of the biblical categories also leads to **two other dangerous areas**.

1. Psychological Parenting

It’s popular to encourage parents to discern their child’s inner needs. The way one person puts it is that children have driving needs for things like security, significance, and strength.

The problem with such approaches is that they don’t take the problem seriously enough. Even given such psychological needs, every such desire is twisted as a result of the fall. The need for security will be selfishly pursued, the need for significance will be arrogantly demanded, and the need for strength will be sinfully abused.

2. Crisis-Point Parenting

In this approach parents try to get kids to make significant milestone-decisions.

Get Them Saved

This is certainly our hope as parents. The problem is that we can’t guarantee the conversion of our children. Salvation occurs through God-ordained means, but it’s still a sovereign work of God.

Even childhood professions of faith need to be tested and evaluated over time, just like with any adult. We should encourage our children to trust Jesus and turn from sin. But only time will tell if a child is truly converted, and that means that **our job doesn’t end with a profession of faith**.

Get Them Surrendered

Recognizing that the task doesn’t end with a profession of faith, parents hope the youth group will take them to camp where they will say “No!” to sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll, and “Yes!” to full-time Christian service.

The real **danger with both approaches** is that they treat the cross like the yearly flu shot. So long as you’ve had your gospel flu shot (prayed the prayer and been to camp), you really don’t need the gospel all that much.

Remember: How we view our children determines how we disciple our children.

Whether or not your children ever profess Christ, whether or not they ever get better grades than Theo, **our kids always need the same message: the hope of the gospel**. That is their greatest need. – Brad Baughman

See the back page where Pastor Herb Owen discusses the implications of this article