The Roles of Parents and the Church in a Child’s Spiritual Life

By Josh Mulvihill

A helpful picture of the Children and Family Ministry at Grace is that of a zipper. Both sides of the zipper, representing Church and home, come together to form a strong bond with one purpose; the discipleship of children.

My challenge as the Pastor to Children and Families is to coordinate the discipleship efforts of Grace Church and the discipleship efforts of parents as they apply to children. Grace Church will be active on two fronts; supporting, equipping, and encouraging parents to accomplish their role in the home, and directly ministering to the children of Grace Church.

Repeatedly, the Bible gives parents the responsibility to nurture a child’s faith as well as the primary role to teach and model God’s truth to children. This is critical for both parents and the Church to understand so that the biblical responsibility given to parents is not ignored and asked of the church.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 God’s intention for parents is clearly addressed. God’s Word is taught to adults, then it is to be passed on to children. Parents cannot teach children the truths of the Bible if they do not know and treasure it themselves. There is a progression: parents first, children second. God’s method regarding how parents nurture a child’s faith is rather open ended. Parents are to incorporate God into the daily rhythms of life such as meal time, bed time, and travel time.

It is a high calling to be a parent: to mold a young life, and to be a messenger of truth. Parents must take the responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of their children seriously, and Grace Church wants to do all it can to help parents succeed in this role.

If God has given parents the role of nurturing their child’s faith, what is the role of the Church in the spiritual life of the child? The Church’s role in the life of the child is the same as adults. At times, the Church applies different assumptions to its youngest members and this should not be so. The mission of the Church is to make disciples; this includes children and youth (Matt. 28:18-20). The Church is given the command to disciple individuals and to teach them to obey God’s ways. Believing parents have an important role to play, but this does not negate the mission of the Church. The Church is called to make disciples of all ages.

The family is not the Church, and the Church is not the family. Each is given distinct roles in the Bible. The Church is called to disciple all its members, administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper, and coordinate a corporate worship of God. The family is called to bear children and care for the physical and spiritual needs of its members.

Our aim for children at Grace Church should be no different than adults. We will be as serious about instilling a passion for God in the lives of the younger generation as we are for our adults. This passion will be reflected in our teaching, the curriculum we choose, the selection and training of our teachers, and the programs for our young people. It is my hope that as Church and home partner, 3 John 1:4 will be true of our children, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

Send a note of welcome to Pastor Mulvihill at jmulvihill@atgrace.com.