

Podcast 280 Parents as Priests

Being a parent is a the most significant calling with the greatest long-term impact and the least amount of training.

Steve: Let's pray that God will help all of us, because most of us feel we are inadequate. Father, thank You for Your Good Spirit that continues to point us to Jesus and continues to reveal Jesus to us, Who is a wonderful priest and an exemplary Son, and He continues to magnify His Father, Who's an exemplary Dad. So help us to fix our eyes upward this morning. Help us to turn to You with ears to hear and hearts to understand and spirits that'll be in sync with Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

When I was pretty young in my Christian walk, and yet I kept being asked to be a Sunday school teacher or a summer camp counselor or a youth group leader, and probably because I was young and parents saw me as someone that could relate to their children. I was in that world long enough to watch some children grow up, and even after the best efforts of youth leaders and summer camps and weekly Sunday school classes, the children seemed like they were more like their parents than the people that were teaching them were hoping that they'd be.

I don't know if you've heard statistics on this, but I've heard that the average tenure for youth leaders in some large denominations is about a year and a half. Sunday school teachers, in spite of a few saints who have devoted themselves to this calling also experience a high teacher turnover. Parents are the one constant.

I did a little math this morning. If I'm a youth leader, I might get an hour or an hour and a half with a whole group. I don't know how much influence one youth leader has over one individual in the group. The same is true for the Sunday school teacher. I might get 45 minutes by the time we all make our way to class. As a youth leader, we used to play about half the time either doing an activity or a sport or eating. So, again, about 45 minutes for a talk and some question and answer time.

I considered how many hours are there in a week? 168 hours, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. We're not really awake the whole time, so we have to consider the influence of the pillow. If you sleep 8 hours a day, that would be 56 hours. So that gives you 112 waking hours. And I divided 112 by 45 minutes. So what percent of a week do you think a youth leader has with a child?

Scott: Oh, good gravy. A very small percentage. Less than 1%.

Steve: Very good. Less than 1%. Turns out it's 2/3 of 1%. And the same percent would apply to the youth leader. But then I thought, well, that might not be fair. Maybe they're in school for 40 hours a week. You know, 5x8, so that would be 40 hours. It's still 72 hours with parents as opposed to ¾ of an hour with outside parachurch helpers.

I'm not minimizing the desire for those people to serve in parachurch ministries like Awana and some of these ministries. But I know from talking to leadership in Awana that they've arrived at the same conclusion. They can do their best for an hour a week, but if they really want to influence these children for eternity, they need to spend more time training parents.

I think you also have to ask the question, how much training do parents get? I quote this in one of my talks, that parenting is the job with the most significance, the most long-term impact on a child's life, with the least amount of training. I don't know about you, but I've never had a class, "Parenting 101." And I've never had a class on parents as priests or anything except the stuff I've picked up along the way.

When I attended seminary, I trained to be a pastor or a youth group leader or some form of full-time ministry. I took classes on preaching, classes on counseling, classes on Bible, church history, and the social impact of the Bible. Looking back, I really wish there had been a class on being the priest of my home.

One of the things that I used to think about as I read through Scripture, was the family dynamics of the saints. Job prayed for his children every day, and offered sacrifices for them. Aaron was anointed and set apart to be the high priest. And I thought, boy, I wonder if we should have anointing services for parents. Have you ever thought about that?

Maybe we should set apart time for parents to come up in front of the church, and the elders would lay their hands on them and pray for them and set them apart to raise up their children for Christ. Not only was Aaron set apart to be a priest, but David the king was anointed with the Holy Spirit so that he would be a godly king.

Perhaps we should have something where parents are set apart like elders are set apart, and like deacons are set apart. I've been in services where evangelists were brought up to the front and anointed, and the elders laid their hands on them. But, all that to say, I'm feeling in my heart more and more that I need to be set apart to be the priest of my home.

Even a well-meaning pastor only spends a little bit of time Sunday morning with his flock and sporadic visits throughout the week. Whereas parents are with the kids throughout the week, depending on how much time they spend with their peers, their pillow, and at school.

I'd be willing to bet that most of the folks listening to this podcast are parents who are really seeking God to be a tremendous influence in the lives of their kids. One of the neat things that came out of a conversation I had with a man recently - who's been asking me for some help as kind of a mentor. One of the things he told me during one conversation was, "You know, we've talked seven times in the past couple years." I'm surprised that he remembered how many times we talked, because we don't live near to each other, and we do this over Zoom.

He continued, "You have a consistent message, and it's been consistent every time we talk." And I said, "Wow, that's pretty good. Maybe I'm either getting older, or maybe I've really latched onto something." And he said, "Yeah. You talk about how your relationship with God influences your relationship with everybody else."

I agreed. No matter what talk the conference people give to me, that theme emerges. Because I am convinced that I can only give what I've received. I can only really pass on the things that God has given to me. So I think that's part of the responsibility of a priest, is not only just to think about passing on things to their children, but they need to be thinking about spending time with their Heavenly Father to become more like Him.

I used to think it would be kind of dull working in a temple. Priests that I read about in the Bible, don't really inspire me too much. However now that I'm really enjoying my time with my Heavenly Father, I think I would like spending time in the temple.

David said, "I'd like to be a fly on the wall in the temple," or something, I forget the exact reference. He just wanted to be in God's presence, because I think he knew God in a different way than the average priest. He didn't look upon it as a vocation. He looked upon it as his heart. Man, he just loved to be with his Dad.

Being a priest I think really starts with our own relationship with God where we love Him, and hopefully, like Moses, we'll come down from the mountain, having spent time with our Dad, and our face will be glowing and our kids will say, "Wow! How'd Dad get like that? Or where'd that glow come from?"

May God help our children to be drawn to God in a new way because dads are drawn to God. I've always kind of seen my role, as good or bad as it is, as trying to represent my Heavenly Father to my kids. I want to show them that I pray. I remember David Howard, who was the brother of Elisabeth Elliot. He used to try to wake up and beat his dad downstairs. But no matter how early he made his way downstairs his father was already up, kneeling, and having his private devotions, and probably praying for his children. Phillip Howard took his responsibility seriously as the father of the home, to be the priest of the home.

God has made us a kingdom of priests. And that's part of our role, to be praying not only for our family, but for our neighbors, for our church, for our nation. But it starts at home. That's the qualifications for a priest is, at least in the New Testament. Paul says the qualifications for a bishop or overseer is somebody that knows how to rule well their own home.

So it really starts with each of us as dads, to be praying for our families, to be living out God's Word for our families, to be teaching them God's law. That's a priestly function that Ezra had, to be teaching the children of Israel God's ways. In a

similar way, that's our job as parents, to be teaching, to be praying, to be representing God in our home. Whew! It's a high calling.

Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit to help us. And one of the most encouraging things that I ever heard when I was a young father was when someone told me that God doesn't require me to be successful. He requires me to be faithful. He's the One that moves in people's hearts. I'm just supposed to be doing what God gives me to do and praying and trusting Him to provide the insight, to provide the fruit. My job is to be sowing the seeds, praying for my family, teaching God's Word, and keeping up to date with my own spiritual walk with God so that I can pass it on to my kids.

Being a father is an interesting dynamic, because we're still children ourselves. We're children of God, we're growing ourselves, we're still learning. And the other side of it, God's called us to pass on things to our children and to teach them God's law and to teach them His ways. It is sobering to realize that we're the first Christians our kids ever see.

But instead of getting overwhelmed by that, what it really helped me to do is to say, "I want to give them as good an example of Christ as I can." So this thought stirs me to become more like Christ and it stirs me in my own walk with God. God has anointed moms and dads to be His representatives in their home. The family is the first time that kids get to watch moms and dads who are followers of Christ. It's the first time that kids get to see the gospel fleshed out. It's the first time that kids get to see moms and dads apologizing to each other, illustrating the gospel. And we make a tremendous impression on our kids.

Most of us are more like our parents than we care to admit. I wrote down on a piece of paper how much I was like my parents. I used to think I was so different from everyone else in my home. I was the first person in my family to respond to the gospel, and I was the first one to go to a Young Life ranch and commit my life to Christ in college. I was the first one to be a Christ-follower. When I was asked to pray over the food, my brothers would complain that I prayed too long.

As a result I always thought that I was kind of the radical one. And yet, several years ago, I was going through some real deep soul searching, and I think one of the assignments was to make a list and write down some of the qualities that you inherited from your parents and what you learned from your parents. I filled several pages. When I looked over my list, I was more like my parents than I'd ever dared dream.

When we grew up a little bit I recognized that I had absorbed so much from them because I had lived in the home with them, and watched them, and saw them make decisions. They were the most important people in my life. Surprisingly I saw that I was more like my parents than I ever believed.

When you're younger and everything is black and white, all you can see is people's faults. It's just a fact. The older you get, the more you appreciate your parents. So I made several pages of things that I appreciated about them and things that I wished perhaps they'd done differently. I sought to do it in a way that was honoring to them, because we are called to, "Honor your mom and dad," instead of disparaging them. But when I finished that assignment, I said, "Wow. I'm more like my parents than I ever realized." And it really helped me to honor them and to think of them that way.

Now my ambition is to be more like Christ. I want to be transformed into the image of my Heavenly Father. Now I want to consciously try to be like my Heavenly Father so my kids can say, 'Yeah, Pop had a lot of faults, but there was a couple things where he really stood out, and it was his love for God, and it was his love for His Word, and it was his prayer life.' I want my kids to be impacted by my life. Sadly when you live with somebody 24/7, you see their warts as well as their good parts. It is helpful to kind of step back and see how much your parents have influenced you. Scott: Psychologists or whatever say that the dad is the first view of God as Father, and that's why a lot of people have such problems relating to God as Father, is because their earthly father wasn't so great. This calling of being a dad, or, if you're a woman, being a mom, is really huge. For me, it's a little difficult to think of the priest part of it because priest conjures up images of robes and collars and all that stuff, and I probably just need to spend more time in the Word to think of what a real priest is. But when I think about the high calling of being a dad or a mom and how much that impacts my kids.

I want them to think that "Dad likes me. Maybe not all the time, when I do something terrible, but he loves me, I know he always loves me, and I know he likes me, and he'll forgive me, and he'll ask forgiveness from me." You know, those kinds of things. Because I've screwed up, I'm sure, but you want the relationship to be solid, where the love and the like is never questioned.

Steve: Amen. And that's probably the saddest thing to me, is how many children grow up in homes without a dad, or even the ones that have dads, an abusive dad. It is a stimulus for each of us when we realize we've got these little guys watching us, and we want them to follow Christ. And then it makes us take our game up a notch. I really think it does, and especially when you start seeing your kids emulating you and doing the things that you do, and you think, "Huh! Why can't you do the good things that I do?" They seem to pick up on our bad habits.

Thankfully, I think God gives us an anointing. Just like He anoints people for roles in the church, He anoints pastors, He anoints kings, He anointed priests, and I think there's an anointing that comes for moms and dads, and I think we need to count on that anointing. I've wondered if we shouldn't have services like that. w

When somebody has a baby we bring up mom and dad to the front of the church and anoint them and set them apart to be the priest of their home or the one that's going to be influencing your children the most. Because the parents are the greatest influence of their kids. It is. God help us, especially dads, to step up to the plate.

Father, thank You for being our Dad. Thank You for being our Savior. Thank You for being our Creator. Thank You for giving us grace, and thank You for this calling to be the priests in our home. We don't feel equal to it, and I pray that You will forgive us for where we've fallen short and cleanse us from condemnation so we're not beating ourselves up, wishing we'd done better. But help us to walk in newness of life, lots of grace, lots of faith, and I pray for a fresh anointing on us as the priests in our home. I pray for Your Spirit to come alongside of us and encourage people who are listening today, encourage dads, encourage moms, encourage us, and help us to take our responsibilities not as heavy burdens, but as opportunities to reflect Christ in our homes. In Jesus' name, amen.