

Raising Spiritual Champions

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2: 11-12 (Readings Deut 4:4-9; 1 Thess 2:1-16)

Peter and Katherine have started a new phase in your life's journey...

You are parents, given the responsibility to raise children.

We, as their church family, have joined in our commitment and support to help you in this role.

But how do you raise your children? How do we help you?

Not a full-on seminar about parenting...

but a brief focus on an important aspect of parenting.

George Barna, statistics guru on all things church in the USA, and he has been doing it for over 20 years.

He came to realize that there was a huge missing dimension society and its raising of children.

It affected he so much he was driven to write a book entitled *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*.

He gives some damning statistics and numbers on the plight of children in the USA (and are we any different here in Australia) in 4 dimensions of children's well-being:

Educational/intellectual;

Health/physical

Emotional/Behavioural

And the hinge...which he calls 'the missing' link on which all the others depend is:

The spiritual/moral health of children...hugely overlooked.

Quote, "Every dimension of a person's experience hinges on his or her moral and spiritual condition." (28)

Often parents and educators are bent on children having a better life, the ability to live the good life.

That 'good life' is defined as the presence of things:

Wendy Harmer (Comedian) is putting together a documentary called 'Stuff', looking at our obsession with accumulating stuff for security.

Age article: wanting everything.

The 'good life' is the presence of comfort and security,

And the absence of hardship and disappointment.

Well-intentioned parents often try to buy experiences and environments that foster a soft and satisfying lifestyle for their children.

In contrast the biblical understanding of the 'good life' is one that provides opportunities to experience, obey, and serve God and other people.

That certainly was Paul's aim in the verses we have read together...

To love lives worthy of God.

Even the experience of difficulties, failure and even persecution are not indicators of failure but events that build character and test the resolve to know, love and serve God.

Barna says that the moral and spiritual foundations that permit us to lead holy and servant-like lives is what we should be developing...so we are building spiritual champions.

As Christians we say 'Amen' to that!

Peter and Katherine will say 'Amen' to that too.

Paul is saying that too in the letter he wrote to the Thessalonians.

He wrote this letter while he was in ministering in Corinth.

He had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check things out because he was driving himself crazy wondering what happened to those new believers after he had left.

When Timothy returned, he brought back good news.

In response Paul sat down and wrote this letter we now have in our Bible.

Today we are looking at just 2 verses of this letter....

Paul wrote these verses to describe the kind of leader that he was...

explaining that he had made every effort to treat that church like a good parent would treat their child.

Look at verses 7: "...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."

And now at our verses (11 & 12)

"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory..."

Paul tried to be a good parent to that church, and so ends up giving us the basics of what a good parent LOOKS like, and what a good parent ACTS like.

In those verses Paul reveals for us 3 characteristics of parents, which can help us immensely...

Not just as parents, but as believers living in community.

The characteristics are: encouraging, comforting and urging.

We Need To Encourage Our Children

Encouragement is a powerful tool, one that when used the right way can make an incredible impact on the life of another person.

It can help them to hang in there when they feel like quitting –
and it can cause someone to be able to dream big dreams.

The word in our text that is translated encourage is *parakaleo*

It is a word used also of the Holy Spirit (King James...Paraclete)

It means to stand beside, to exhort, to come to ones aid.

I like that picture, of someone standing beside me –
encouraging me to cheer me on.

It's like the little boy who said to his dad,

“Let's play darts dad. I'll throw and you say great shot!”

Parents/Grandparents let me ask you a question - how good are you at encouraging?

Would your children say that you are a good encourager?

Did you know that it takes about 10 words of encouragement to undo just 1 negative comment?

How do we encourage:

1. We encourage with our **presence**:

Just being with people is an encouragement to them.

It shows them that we care, and it tells them that they are important to us.

There is a great example of this in Acts 28:15.

Paul had been in prison for over 3 years, he survived a shipwreck at sea,
and now he had just arrived in Rome, still a prisoner.

Unknown to Paul a bunch of his friends – some fellow Christians
traveled a great distance to be there to meet him when the ship came in...

Luke records these words,

“...at the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged....”

You have no idea what it does for a person to see you walk into a hospital room or into their home.

Or what it means to our kids for them to look in the stands or into the audience and see mom & dad sitting there.

2. We encourage with our **touch**.

There is something very therapeutic about the human touch, and sometimes a hand on a shoulder or a gentle hug can do more to encourage someone than we can ever imagine.

Why do you think Jesus touched the lepers?

Have you seen the bumper sticker, “Have you hugged your kid today?”

Well have you?

3. We encourage with **God's Word**

Remember our objective in parenting is that our children may live lives worthy of God.

Well one of the ways we can make this happen is through God's word.

As I wrote this, I became I am convicted of the fact, that I do not do this enough.... I need to change this BECAUSE God's word is powerful and it has, can and will accomplish great things;

4. We encourage with **our words**

Now this can be done in many ways; we can talk to them in person, call them up on the phone, e-mail them, or through a card or letter.

The cool thing about cards and letters is that we can save them and look at them over & over again.

We need to encourage our children to live lives worthy of God.

We Need To Comfort Our Children

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God..." 2 Corinthians 1:3,4

Our God is an awesome comforter, would you agree?

I am sure that many times you have found great comfort from Him.

But sometimes that comfort comes through God's people.

Ann Gilbert writes; "To help our four year old overcome her fear of the dark, her father and I always reassured her at bedtime that God was watching over her. One night after I had gone to bed, I felt a soft tap on my shoulder. "Mommy," a familiar small voice spoke up, "I know God's in there with me, but I need somebody with skin."

Sometimes, the person with skin on that your children/friends need, is you.

There will be times when your child will need your comfort; times when they fall, fail or get hurt (emotionally & physically) - and your comfort at those times shows them that you care - that you love them.

Our homes should be places of comfort

A place that is safe, a secure place, a place where they know they are accepted, and where people care about them, a place where they are loved and valued.

A place where there will always be someone on their side

Two essential ingredients in the process for helping our children live lives worthy of God are encouragement and comfort.

The next is urging.....

We Need To Urge Our Children

We need to urge, to motivate them to live a life worthy of God.

But how do we do that? How do we urge them?

A key to understanding this, is the meaning of the Greek word in our text that is translated urge, it is a form of the verb *martureo*, which means to 'bear witness'. The noun form of this word is where we get our English word *martyr*.

So how do we 'bear witness' to our children to live a life worthy of God?

One way is by being an example.

We, live a life that is worthy of God.

We, give them an up close and personal example, of what it means to live a life that is worthy of God.

Parents don't expect your kids to live it, if you are not living it.

As one person wisely observed: "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

What kind of example are you of living a life worthy of God?

If they really followed your example - would God be pleased?

These following verses definitely apply to parents as they strive to motivate and urge their children.

"...In everything set them an example, by doing what is good." Titus 2:7

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." 1 Tim 4:16

In addition to what we SAY to our children... what we DO is equally important

When Paul worked with the church at Thessalonica it was his goal to set an example by being "...holy, righteous and blameless... among (those) who believed." (II Thessalonians 2:10)

That should be our goal around our children.

We should strive to be HOLY and RIGHTEOUS and BLAMELESS in our homes.

When our kids watch our behavior... they should see someone who loves God.

When our kids listen to our words...

they should hear someone whose words honor God.

Our goal should be to be Holy and Righteous and Blameless.

BUT we won't always succeed..

Our children may hear us become unreasonable and unfair.
We may allow our temper to get out of hand.
We might even get so angry that we use hurtful words.
We may even swear.

Has that ever happened to you?

Let's face it... as parents, we mess up.
We do things AROUND the kids... or TO the kids... that we know are wrong.

And when that happens... what do parents usually do?
We make excuses for ourselves.
Or we blame them for why we blew up...
Or we just ignore that we ever did anything wrong.

That's dishonest!

Paul told the church at Thessalonica that he tried VERY HARD not to be dishonest in how he treated them...he didn't want them to copy that.

"...the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you." (1 Thessalonians 2:3)

"... we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed...". (1 Thessalonians 2:5)

When we are tempted to make excuses for ourselves, shift blame, or ignore the problem...

That teaches our children to do exactly the same.

They figure: Hey! Mom and Dad did it... why can't I?

Holiness, Righteousness, and Blamelessness IS NOT about being SINLESS
but it is about dealing honestly with our sin.
Repenting, confessing, and owning up that IT WAS WRONG!!!

We have a Saviour who lived a totally holy, blameless and righteous life...
And was crucified in our place.

He was the sinless one...who became sin for us.

Our forgiveness and new life...our fresh start is in him.

We can model what it is like to know the grace of God, be forgiven and to, live for him...

When Asher and I pray together...

He asks me what wrong things he did today...

And he asks me what wrong things I did!

We need to model honesty and openness
then our children learn to be honest in their faith
they learn to practice repentance and humility
and they learn that God's people don't fake it

We're not "holier than thou"
We're just people who love God enough to trust Him to forgive us when we mess up.

We should realize that our children need to see God so powerfully in our lives...
that they just naturally want the relationship with God that we have.

Larry Crabb tells about watching his father pray when he was only 4 years old.
"It was Sunday morning, and about 50 people gathered in a circle at our (Lord's
Supper) service. Dad stood to pray. I was lying on the floor, looking up at him. Even
now, the memory is clear. I thought to myself, 'He actually thinks he is talking to
Someone. And whoever it is means more to him than anyone else...'"

Conclusion

Paul realized that God had given him a special responsibility for this congregation
that he had given started.

Likewise...Peter and Katherine you have a special task:
To influence your children.

Your children are a sacred trust from God... a gift from God.

Because children are gifts from God –
God is the one we should seek to please when we raise our children.
Our purpose and aim is that they might live lives worthy of God.

We pray that God will give you all you need to raise up spiritual champions...
and we promise to help you (and each other) in that role.