

BaptistWay: Children

June 13, 2015

- *The BaptistWay lesson for June 28 focuses on Psalm 127:3-5; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:1-9.*

Sacred moments

Each moment with a child is sacred. The moments are sacred because they are a pairing of one whom Christ has set as the paradigm of faith with one who knows the need for and the way of faith. In these moments, the child and the adult stand in mutual need, one needing to grow in the way of faith, the other needing to remember the joy of it.

Take some time to make a list of all the moments you can think of with a child, things like what children do (precious, funny, annoying and blood boiling)—in the car, when they are learning household responsibilities, with their friends and so on. How is each a sacred moment?

These moments flash by like a slide show we replay in our minds as we watch these children walk across some stage to receive some diploma before they are off to walk some way on their own.

The weight of it; the joy of it

The moments are so brief, we seldom notice how thin is the distance between here and heaven when we are with a child. In each moment, we have the grand honor of teaching that child the ways of an eternal kingdom. Unfortunately, we all too often are wrapped up in the fading kingdom of this world, reflecting it more readily than the eternal.

What are we to do?

Proverbs 22:6 is a frequently recited promise, especially to parents: “Train

up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

I wonder about this promise or at least how it is used.

For some, Proverbs 22:6 is a source of hope. For others, the verse is a source of guilt. Rather than assuming the verse is a straightforward, ironclad promise, take time to talk about people’s perspectives on and experiences with it, asking such questions as:

- Does this verse give you hope or stir up guilt?
- What stories do you have about children departing from their Christian upbringing?
- What stories do you have about children returning to or staying estranged from that upbringing?
- How do you celebrate a child’s return?
- How do you grieve a child’s departure? A child staying gone?

I grieve with those who have suffer through children leaving the way. I struggle alongside those who wrestle with cynical feelings about a promised return. I rejoice with those whose children have returned to faith. Take time to grieve, wrestle and celebrate together.

Trading guilt for joy

Christian parents and grandparents often are overwhelmed by the responsibility of training a child to follow God. We feel the full weight of eternal significance, and we don’t want to mess up. Under pressure, we read Deuteronomy 6:1-9, and we fixate on the unstated curse things will not go well for those who disobey God’s commands, overlooking the joy of the stated promise. In fixating on the unstated curse, we also overlook

something else.

God gave this command to a people who had failed to obey God again and again. Despite their failings, God seemed to think the Israelite parents and grandparents were capable of teaching their children and grandchildren to do what they themselves had not yet learned to do—remain faithful to God.

God was gracious in giving the command

Parents and grandparents are not expected to earn tenure at a major research institution in order to train their children and grandchildren to obey God. They are simply to “(talk) about (God’s commands) when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

Orthodox Jews take this command literally, the men wearing phylacteries (or *tefillin*) on their head and arm. They also affix a *mezuzah* to the doorframe at the entrance of their home. Although literal practices, they are simple and straightforward ways to keep God’s commands in view.

- What are some simple and straightforward ways you can keep God’s commands in view?
- What are some simple and straightforward ways you can talk about God’s commands “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up?”

Where I find hope

The good news is that teaching is the best way to learn. As we lead our children to follow God’s ways, we may be learning these same ways ourselves. What joy there is in discovering faith and in drawing closer to

God together.

- What are your interests, skills and experiences? How can you use these things in teaching children the ways of God?

Remember

As adults, we have the responsibility of training our children and grandchildren in God's ways. Our children and grandchildren have the responsibility of keeping God's ways. We cannot keep God's ways for them.