



# LIFE-GIVING HOMES

*Family: The Forming Centre for Faith and Life*



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# CHAPTER LIST

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*“It appears that the natural family as a whole has been the human symphony through which God has historically been heard by many people — not the prophets, not the philosophers, but a great many of the rest; and the gradual but by now recognizable muffling of that symphony is surely an important and overlooked part of the story of how certain Western men and women came not to hear the sacred music any more.”<sup>1</sup>*



*Mary Eberstadt*

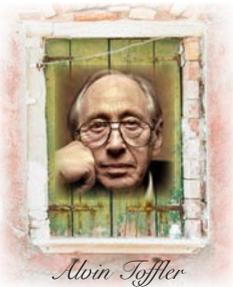
# CHAPTER 1

*It's time to listen to the music*

As we struggle globally to hear the strains of the sacred music of the family symphony today, this chapter is written from the conductor's podium as the resonant notes from the authors quoted in this short document join together to amplify this concerto. It's time to listen to the music!

Almost 40 years ago, **Alvin Toffler** described the view from his kitchen window in this way,

*“All the old roots—religion, nation, community, family and profession—are now shaking under the hurricane impact of today’s accelerative thrust. In the midst of all this change sits the family—stunned by the shockwaves of novelty, shifting values, and information overload, wondering how they are going to survive. ‘The family has been called the “giant shock absorber” of society’. Home is ‘the Place to which the bruised and battered individual returns after doing battle with the world, the one stable point in an increasingly flux filled environment’.”<sup>2</sup>*



*Alvin Toffler*

While our ‘society’s cars’ are getting faster and sleeker, with all the creature comforts, scant attention continues to be paid to the shock absorbers that have the potential to smooth the journey for its passengers. This has to change.

These few short pages do not allow space for a full exploration of the Bible’s teaching on this subject. Enough has been written already, from the broad range of perspectives within Christendom, clearly emphasising God’s priority for, and teaching about, family. This is written however with a strong commitment to God’s original blueprint for family, longing to see Christ-centred homes breathing life into relationships. Therefore, from this platform, solidly shaped by your own study into this topic, we journey forward to consider some of the urgent challenges facing us as the people of God as we strive together to see children everywhere walking with Jesus ... all the days of their lives.

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*“Time was when  
the whole of life went  
forward in the family,  
in a circle of loved,  
familiar faces .....*

*That time has gone  
forever. It makes us  
very different from our  
ancestors.”<sup>3</sup>*



*Peter Laslett*

## CHAPTER 2

*Rethinking family*

In all of the English language, perhaps there is no more confusing word than family. We can ignore the debates and magazine articles about the state of the family, but we cannot ignore the importance of the family. The majority of children in the world are born into families and spend a lot of their growing up time in and around the family household.

Families are tied together by invisible strands that give continuity and stability, even when family members are far apart emotionally or geographically. Like construction workers, we need to build families that will stand firm through storms and change.

Have we forgotten that there really is no higher calling than to raise a child? As we engage, individually and corporately, in the mission given to us by Jesus to “*make disciples*” in our going (the passive participle ‘Go’ from the Great Commission), there is an urgent need to reclaim the role of the family in lifelong discipleship.

God created us to live in families and He gave us a pattern to follow for the nurture of children and for the succession of human kind. The creation of family as a unit within the broader human family was established at the very beginning of the Bible because it reflects the very character of God to the world that He has made. But that pattern was broken in that first garden with the result that families come in many shapes and sizes across the world today. One will look with little success to find pictures of model families in the pages of Scripture! Just as in biblical times, we live today in a world filled with broken hearts and broken homes.

Globally we are confronted by the struggles and the results of fragile, hurting families ... with devastating and concerning affects on our communities and society.

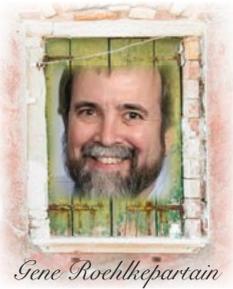
Countless definitions of ‘family’ have been written. Here are two examples:

- ‘Two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside in the same household’
- ‘Those people with whom we share our faith, values, and purpose as they relate to a life of hope and love’

Debates over definitions of what constitutes a 'family' today continue in the private sector and in public squares. While these are important conversations, an emphasis on theological purity can be at the expense of an intentional and compassionate focus on producing higher levels of healthy functionality and interconnectedness within homes and communities. God's will and design is that through family, Christ is formed in His people and nurtured in their faith to find the 'life to the full' that Jesus talked about.

**Gene Roehlkepartain** writes,

*“Churches have been so focused on debating which forms of family are acceptable or unacceptable that they have failed to engage meaningfully with today’s complex and diverse families. As a result, they have not only inhibited one of the most powerful crucibles of faith formation, but have become increasingly irrelevant to the most meaningful and motivating part of life for the vast majority of people in our communities: their families.”<sup>4</sup>*



*Gene Roehlkepartain*

This short document does not provide an extensive theological treatise of God's view of family. Rather, the intention is to add to and expand current definitions of family so that the diversity found in today's family culture is embraced. Family can be defined by '**structure**' and by '**function**'. A functional definition seems to be a better fit for Jesus' teaching about family.

Followers of Christ are not to be bound by the structures of legally recognised or biologically based relationships. Rather, family relationships are defined by the relationship process – loving one another, being faithful to the same Lord, and adopting one another as brothers and sisters in the household of faith. A functional understanding of family calls on the community of faith to offer hope and support for all members of the family.

## TWO HEBREW PERSPECTIVES

There is no direct translation for the word 'family' in the Old Testament. Instead, there are multiple words in the Hebrew that have been translated as 'family' more than 2000 times in our modern Bibles. The two most commonly used words give us two clear lenses through which we gain a more holistic understanding of family to direct our efforts. Derivations of the root word '*bayith*' are used more than 1700 times in the Old Testament and this word means 'household' which reaches beyond birth and adoptive ties. We encounter this word in the instructions for the Passover meal (Exodus 12:21-28).

The second most commonly used word is '*mishpachah*' which carries within it the sense of 'tribe, clan or community'; it is in effect a bond of kinship uniting people to a common cause. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 and 11:18-19, when instructions are given for the passing on of the belief system from one generation to the next, are written in the context of 'mishpachah'.

In our ministry to families, our aim is to grow family members in living out and sharing faith with one another. But we also desire for each family to become a relational unit of mission and ministry to others - neighbours, friends, work colleagues. We want our homes to become more than isolated havens for family members. We want them to be places of care and hospitality and affirmation for those who are not legally family, but are welcomed as if they were.



In summary, we understand...

**FAMILY is .... the home**



The life shaping, faith forming and missional centre for building the Kingdom

Family is a group of people of varying ages, usually connected biologically, sometimes living together, sometimes separated.

*Healthy families build healthy communities*

**FAMILY is ... community**



The extended family of God in which the church has a vital role in empowering households to be salt and light in the world

Family is a group of people of varying ages, connected through relationship, geographical location and through a shared journey of faith.

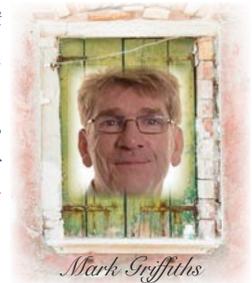
*Church is a family not an event.*

God’s design is that through the intentional ongoing interaction and partnership between the home and the community (of which the church is a vital partner), lifelong faith will be nurtured and lived out. Family ministry is not just a ministry to families and ministry for families. Family ministry is ministry with families and ministry in families.

The family is the most important group of people mentioned in the Bible. The gathered church (*mishpachah*) comes alongside each household (*bayith*) in a complementary role in the development of lifelong, active faith.

**Mark Griffiths** says,

*“Our journey with children, helping to see Christ formed in them, must involve active participation within the bayith and mishpachah settings. If 21st-century children’s work misses either of these dimensions, it is to seriously jeopardise the impact of your ministry to this rising generation”<sup>5</sup>*



*Mark Griffiths*

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*“Family and faith are the invisible double helix of society — two spirals that when linked to one another can effectively reproduce, but whose strength and momentum depend on one another.”<sup>6</sup>*



*Mary Eberstadt*

## CHAPTER 3

*Home is where the heart is*

## THE ROLE OF THE HOME

Families are, by nature, intensive laboratories of human relationship. It is as families navigate the ever changing and often tumultuous rapids of life, that strong relationships are formed - relationships that are the key building blocks in the process of spiritual formation.

Many influential leaders, past and present, have echoed the priority of the home in this spiritual formation process. Here are some voices to infect our thinking...

**Dolores Leckey** calls the Christian family a "sacred shelter", by which she means

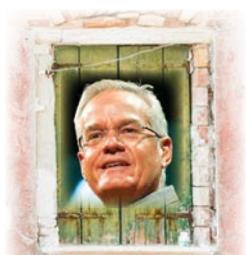
*"A place of acceptance, nurture and Grace that empowers family members to participate in God's ongoing acts of compassion and salvation."*<sup>7</sup>



*Dolores Leckey*

**Bill Hybels**, during his long tenure as Senior Pastor at Willow Creek, acknowledged the role of parents when he said,

*"The upcoming generation confronts an obstacle to belief that goes beyond worship style, teaching relevance, or church program excellence, because it's not about what is happening at church. It's about what's missing at home ... .generational faith transference is in serious decline."*<sup>8</sup>

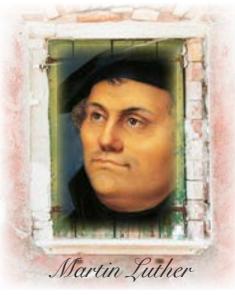


*Bill Hybels*

**Pope Paul VI** in 1966, and cited again by **Pope Francis**, referred to the family as "**domestic church**". In so doing he was reaching back to a time honoured tradition reflecting a biblical priority.

**Martin Luther** wrote,

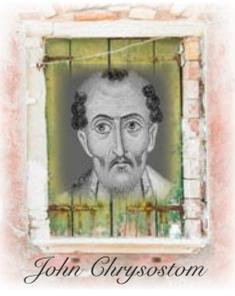
*“Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the Gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.”<sup>9</sup>*



*Martin Luther*

**John Chrysostom** was the Archbishop of Constantinople in the 4th century. He described parents as:

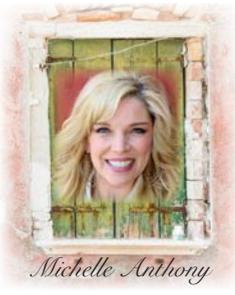
*“‘artists’ who sculpt statues with great precision, for they are helping to restore the image of God in their offspring and thereby forming them into ‘wondrous statues for God’”<sup>10</sup>*



*John Chrysostom*

**Michelle Anthony** writes,

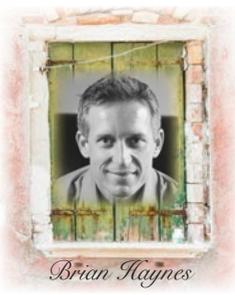
*“Spiritual parenting is not perfect parenting – it’s parenting from a spiritual perspective with eternity in mind. It is a way of parenting that declares, “I want to parent the child or children that God gave me in such a way that I first honour God, and then second create the best environment to put my children in the path of the Divine.”<sup>11</sup>*



*Michelle Anthony*

The most important building blocks in the holistic development of children are parents who have a disciplined intentionality about their spiritual parenting. **Brian Haynes** names the greatest challenge to the fulfilment of this vision when he says,

*“The greatest obstacle parents have to overcome in leading their children spiritually is their own mediocre or morbidly religious relationship with God accompanied by a juvenile understanding of his Word.”<sup>12</sup>*

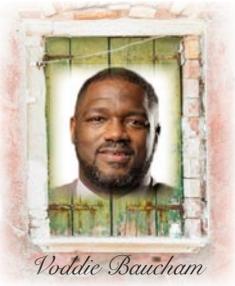


*Brian Haynes*

Time has become a very precious commodity in our world – and the way that we spend our time reflects our priorities. Parents rightly invest in the preparation of their children for their career and future, but this must be balanced with a stronger investment in their moral and spiritual formation towards godly character and life.

**Voddie Baucham** asserts,

*“Our children are not falling away because the church is doing a poor job—although that is undoubtedly a factor. Our children are falling away because we are asking the church to do what God designed the family to accomplish. Discipleship and multi-generational faithfulness begins and ends at home. At best, the church is to play a supporting role as it “equips the saints for the work of ministry”<sup>13</sup>*





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*“What if family were not really the object of the church’s teaching mission, but one of the most basic units of the church’s mission to the world?” <sup>14</sup>*

*Marjorie Thompson*

# CHAPTER 4

*It takes a church to raise a parent*

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

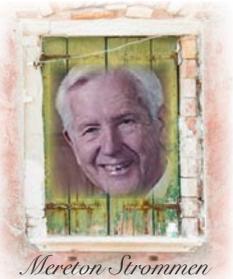
While we celebrate the birth and growth of a Sunday School movement that began almost 250 years ago, we must also lament this beginning of the fragmentation and disempowerment of the family household in terms of spiritual formation. Age-graded Christian education became the norm as a raft of para-church agencies came into being and operated in the same sector. The last 50 years has seen the rise of the professionally trained and paid 'age ministry' leader in churches.

**Rob Rienow** reflects on this change when he says that the jurisdiction for faith formation shifted from the home to the church during this period, and this largely is the norm today.<sup>15</sup>



**Mereton Strommen** writes,

*“Congregational leaders have erred in allowing the focus of faith development to shift away from the family and to become centred on the congregation.”<sup>16</sup>*



Lasting faith is birthed and nurtured in the home, complemented by a supportive faith community.

The church must assume the role as a training ground and support agency for parents to be the soul doctors for their children. The title of **Rachel Turner's** book, *“It takes a village church to raise a child parent”<sup>17</sup>* highlights a key strategy in building whole families today. People who care about the spiritual formation of children must be concerned about the spiritual formation of the parents and their finding of a place in the faith community. The spiritual formation of children begins with the spiritual formation of their parents.

Marjorie Thompson asks this question pertinent to our discussion,

*“What if family were not really the object of the church’s teaching mission, but one of the most basic units of the church’s mission to the world?”<sup>18</sup>*



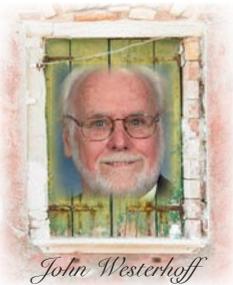
The church is called to supplement and support faith nature in the home, but because many homes are harried and stressed, the church often replaces the calling of the home instead. One of the important tasks of the church is to ask,

- How can we partner with parents in faith nurture activities?
- What challenges do parents face, and what can we provide to encourage them to work through these challenges?

Some people talk about the important role of parents in helping the children “find faith” at home. The real issue is not so much finding faith at home as it is living the faith at home. If we are going to see parents truly embracing their roles as the primary disciplers of their children, then we need to radically rethink our role as leaders in the church community.

**John Westerhoff** puts it bluntly,

*“The schooling-instructional Paradigm is bankrupt. Faith cannot be taught by any method of instruction; we can only teach religion. Faith can be inspired within a community of faith. A new Paradigm is needed, and what I call a community of faith-formation paradigm is the one that best addresses the needs of our life.”<sup>19</sup>*



**Ben Freudenberg** summarises this conversation,

*“I am convinced we must shift from a church-centred, homes-supported ministry model to a home-centred, church-supported ministry model. I believe that parents are the primary Christian educators in the church and the family is the God ordained institution for faith building in children and youth and for passing the faith on from one generation to the next.”<sup>20</sup>*



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*“The evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents”<sup>21</sup>*

## SOUL SEARCHING

The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers



Christian Smith  
with Melinda Lundquist Denton

*“Soul Searching”*

# CHAPTER 5

*A taste of some research*

## WHAT THE RESEARCHERS REVEAL

The cascade of data coming in across the Western world and from much of the global south is that churches today are offering more and more programs and making fewer and fewer true disciples. Yet making disciples is what we have been commissioned to do. (Mt 28:19,20).

The **Passing on Faith Report**<sup>22</sup> from the UK released in 2016 surveyed data from:

- 54 studies published over last 40 years
- thousands of young people, parents and grandparents
- the US, Canada, UK, Sweden and Australia
- Christian denominations (including Seventh Day Adventist), Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities.

Their search was for the formative factors in shaping lifelong faith.

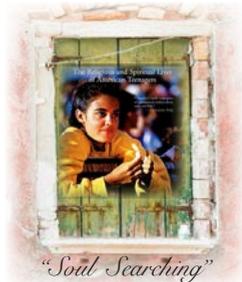
Their top 4 findings were:

- foundations for faith are laid in childhood
- the role and responsibility of the family is central in faith transmission
- enduring adolescent and adult believers are largely the product of caring, supportive, stable homes, where faith is seen, heard and experienced
- modelling is key: parents need to 'be' and 'do' what they want their child to become

'Soul Searching' and 'Almost Christian' interpret the data collected by the **National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)**<sup>23</sup>, which was extensive study conducted with over 3000 youth and young adults over a 7 year period.

In **Soul Searching**, Smith & Denton observe,

*“The evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents”.  
Parents and other interested adults most likely  
“will get what they are”<sup>21</sup>*



Also emerging from the study is that young people do not appear to have a sufficient number of adults, including parents, and others who are vested in their spiritual formation. One of the reasons for this is that adults are not adequately grounded in the faith and therefore fail to engage young people in significant conversations about religious issues.

**Kenda Dean** emphasises the point in *Almost Christian*,

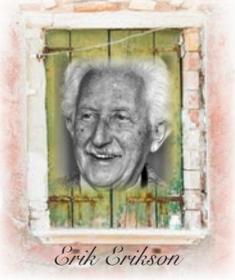
*“What we do know is that giving young people opportunities to talk about faith in families and congregations is positively correlated with holding religious convictions that they can articulate, critically examine, and confess.”<sup>24</sup>*



*Kenda Dean*

The well known and oft quoted developmental psychologist, **Erik Erikson** believed that the faith of parents provided the important support for the child’s emerging sense of trust. Erikson writes,

*“Children need not only the moral words of parents but also the example of ethical living in the family. The moral integrity of parents is important, because children build into their conscience the standards they see lived out in the home. If parents do not live guided by conscience, children lose faith in the reality of goodness and come to believe that arbitrary power controls all.”<sup>25</sup>*



*Erik Erikson*

**Professor Iris Cully** says,

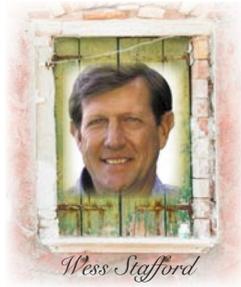
*“The ability to trust is inseparably bound up with faith. Children will develop a basic trust in themselves, others, and God through living with adults who trust themselves, other people and God,”<sup>26</sup>*



*Iris Cully*

**Wess Stafford**, former global director for Compassion and long term advocate for children, summarises the research in this way,

*“When a child gives up hope, dreams are forever shattered. With lost dreams goes the potential and ultimate impact that a child might have had. If we nurture the dreams of children, the world will be blessed. If we destroy them, the world is doomed! We simply must learn to engage with children and walk with them day by day to foster their dreams and make them come true.”<sup>27</sup>*



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*“The collapse of the natural family has reshaped the known world of just about every man, woman, and child alive in the Western world today.”<sup>28</sup>*



*Mary Eberstadt*

## CHAPTER 6

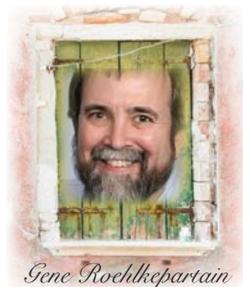
*A strategy for building your home*

## FAMILY BUILDING PILLARS:

In 2012 I spent a week in Northern Iraq leading some multi national training. Over coffee one morning I asked one of the pastors of the two remaining evangelical churches in Kirkuk to describe his church to me. "About how many people would be present at your weekly church gathering?" I asked. His response was different. "We have about 12 families," he said. Intrigued and confronted, I asked the same question during other breaks to some of my newly formed friends from Algeria and Kuwait. Independently their responses used the same metric. Almost any Westerner to whom I asked the same question since, replies with the standard reply based on our priority on the individual. I wonder what our weekend gatherings would look like if they were built around the gathering of the households?

**Gene Roehlkepartain** asks the question,

*"What if the ministries that were announced and celebrated when the community gathers reflect how its members are living out of their faith in their daily lives? How might congregations' ministries with families be different if the centre shifted?"*<sup>29</sup>



*Gene Roehlkepartain*

Gene continues,

*"It is abundantly clear that the narratives about families and faith that may have guided churches two or three generations ago no longer fit the lives of today's diverse families. Autopilot isn't an option for nurturing faith in families in today's complex and changing world. Family centred faith formation in the 21st-century calls for crafting a new narrative that weaves in wisdom from the past with new possibilities."*<sup>30</sup>

As we look back on the efficacy of our discipleship strategies over our recent history, it is not hard to notice the priority given to passing on information about the Christian faith. It is done through Sunday School lessons, Vacation Bible Schools, devotions around the dinner table, memorising Bible verses, and so on. While knowing what you believe (information) is important in the process of forming a follower of Jesus, equally, if not more important, are the experiences in a young person's life that helps them translate information into real life.

**Thomas Groome** in the 1970's summarised the process for any significant, lasting change to be:

### **INFORMATION + FORMATION = TRANSFORMATION**

In our ongoing journeys to appropriate Jesus' words to 'make disciples' - lifelong, active followers of Jesus - there exists an urgent need to balance the focus on information with a focus on formational experiences that will deepen, strengthen and inspire lifelong faith. The family has a foundational role in this process.

A collaborative initiative, driven by the global haemorrhaging of young people from the church and the Christian faith, distilled the findings of global research, reports and literature with interviews with young people leaving and staying with the church. Its aim was to search for some of the key factors in shaping lifelong faith. The findings centred around the top 10 formational experiences that help to develop a more robust and rigorous faith.<sup>31</sup> Similar initiatives by other groups, along with the current library of books being written around the same subject, have also focussed on similar formational strategies - although the language may differ.

Two foundational experiences for lifelong faith formation are crucial:

### **FAMILY NURTURE & GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS**

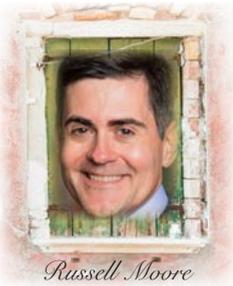
God's plan has always been for children to be born into families where they are nurtured and developed into holistic beings that make positive contributions into the world. The intent of the few words in these pages is to amplify the primacy of the home in the establishing and ongoing nurture of a lifelong faith. But families are not alone in this process.

The intergenerational support provided by the extended family, the faith community, and beyond provide valuable anchors for faith and life in the turbulent waters around them.

Generational fragmentation is a reality that the church must engage as it navigates the 21st century. Generational fragmentation artificially divides the body of Christ and fails to fulfil its calling *"To prepare God's people for works of service..."* Most recently, postmodernism has fuelled a shift in emphasis from the needs of the community to the primacy of the individual. The developmental needs of the individual have become preeminent over the needs of the corporate body. The church is NOT a voluntary organisation - it is a group of people called together by God.

The individual is accountable to God within the community context, which means his or her needs are not the primary focus, but the needs of the community are. When the needs of the individual are preeminent, generational fragmentation is inevitable. We have isolated the generations within our churches from each other, and from the wisdom of those who have gone before them. There is an urgent need to claim our unity and discern new paradigms for ministry that will create community, allow for mentoring, and generate fellowship across both the real and the fabricated generational lines.

*The church is not a collection of families. The church is a family. We are not "family friendly"; we are family. The truth is there is no such thing as a Christian without children. You are part of the church, the household of God, a household into which, in every generation, God brings children. You either treat those children as part of your responsibility, as part of the body of Christ, or you will treat those children as, at least as far as you are concerned, orphans.*<sup>32</sup>



*Russell Moore*

On these two foundations (family nurture and generational connections) the following 8 formational 'pillars' provide a significant support scaffold for the process of building human life.

## SERVING IN MISSION

For too long children have been seen as objects of the mission rather than active participants in the mission. Children are not simply to be seen as jugs to be filled with information but rather as whole people of God who can actively contribute to the mission of God. When any person has to give an account of the hope that is within them this causes their faith to grow deeper. This is true for children as well.



Where are the opportunities for your children to be able to give out as well as taking in as they continue to grow in their journey with Jesus? When children can serve in the mission with their family this has benefits on many levels – strengthening the household of faith as well as spiritual life of each member of the family.

Sending teams to overseas mission fields has been a long held strategy of local church communities. However, very few of these include children. Imagine the impact on a child's faith having served on a mission team in a developing country. But you do not need to go overseas to involve children in a mission project. There are needs all around us if we have eyes to see and if we are prepared to take a few risks.

## RESPONDING WITH COMPASSION

Our children are acutely aware of the brokenness in the world which surrounds them. They have hopes and fears about the future. Too often we provide our children with the adult solutions to some of the world's problems rather than presenting them with the issue at hand and inviting their suggestions for what could be done. The Internet is filled with stories of children today who are changing their community and the world in their own way. What might be possible with your children if they were given the opportunity?



A common scenario is that one of the parents will deliver a meal to a needy family in the community while the other parent stays at home to babysit the children. Or both parents are involved in meeting a local need and they hire a babysitter for the children for this time. How much better would it be, in terms of deepening faith, if the children were involved not only in the delivering or the outworking of this compassionate response but also in the planning and preparation of what is to take place. It is time for some fresh thinking, some creative thinking, some risky thinking about how we can empower our children and give them a voice to be agents of change in our broken world.

### ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

In an entertainment driven, visually stimulated, "I'm bored" generation there is a tendency to fill our program time with children with lots of activity, noise and busyness so as to maintain attention and hopefully communicate something of value. While we need to be cognisant of the 'times and the seasons' and use all we can to be effective communicators, there is a danger that we fill our spaces so full there is no time for our children to hear the voice of God.

Many Christians can remember a time and place where they may have felt particularly close to Jesus, perhaps at an event or at a particular episode in their life. These same Christians would testify how important that moment was and continues to be in their ongoing faith journey. How important it is for us to create the spaces where our children can encounter the living Jesus – not just in words from the front but in the still small voice of the Spirit of God who desperately wants to communicate with each of us. There are challenges in striving to do this in the context of managing behaviour and large group sizes. But let's not lose the vision as leaders in helping our children connect intimately, personally and regularly with the Son of God.



## POSITIVE PEER COMMUNITIES

It is true in life that we grow to be like our friends. Therefore, the more time we spend with our friends the more we will be influenced by their values and the actions that result. It is also true in life that we cannot choose our children's friends. However, there are some things that parents and those who care for children can do to help each child in the choices they make about friends. As children grow in age, the influence and importance of the peer group becomes more dominant, often at the expense of parental influence. This underlines the importance of creating positive peer environments for our children.



## MENTORING/LIFE COACHING

Imagine a young child sitting alone in their bedroom at night reading the story of Samson slaughtering 1000 Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass. Or reading about Ananias and Sapphira dropping dead because they were a little too liberal with the truth. As adults we would look for someone to talk with about these stories so as to help our understanding of God and His character in the light of these stories. While some children may have the benefit of a Christian parent who may be able to process this, many do not. In the everyday moments of life, stuff happens.



Questions arise every day, small and large, about how life works and why it doesn't work. One of the major reasons why young people choose to leave the church is because their questions about life and faith have not been answered. Life is not meant to be journeyed alone but together in community. Close, warm relationships are vital when we are exploring strange, sometimes threatening territory, when you want to ask some of life's biggest questions, when you want to laugh or cry, or when we simply want to sit and wonder, but not alone. Imagine if every child had someone who is journeying with them through life, in the same way as Jesus walked beside the two disciples on the Emmaus road.

## PEAK EXPERIENCES

A peak experience is a vital complement to the regular activities within the faith community. The experience may be a residential camp, a day camp, a special Saturday program, a concert, a special evening program, and so on. In these contexts, the faith of the young child is deepened through the mixture of meeting new kids with a real faith, being inspired by new leaders with a vibrant faith, living in community, the 'wow' factor of a bigger or special event ... add your own.

## GOD'S BIG STORY

Every part of the Bible – each event, book, character, commands, prophecy and column – must be understood in the context of one storyline. In many cases the approach to faith formation has been built around a series of disconnected Bible stories and memory verses. Our children today are looking for the big story of life and the Bible provides the story. As they enter this story it is important that they discover not only the content but also that they are a part of this story – God's story. It is our privilege to help children find their place in God's big story. As we 'earth' each story in its place in time and space we are giving validity to the story and helping children to see that God's story is the true big story of our world.

## RITEs OF PASSAGE/ANCHORS

Many cultures are rich in significant events to acknowledge the rights of passage of the developing young person within their community. Within Western culture our children move through various life stages, each of which brings its opportunities and challenges. How do we best help a young person to navigate through each of these? – both as a household of faith and as a community of faith? How can we be more strategic and intentional for our kids and create spaces and anchors to help them in their transformation?



An intentional approach, by parents and pastors, in homes and in the church family, to incorporating faith into these experiential building blocks will see information coupled with complementary learning experiences.

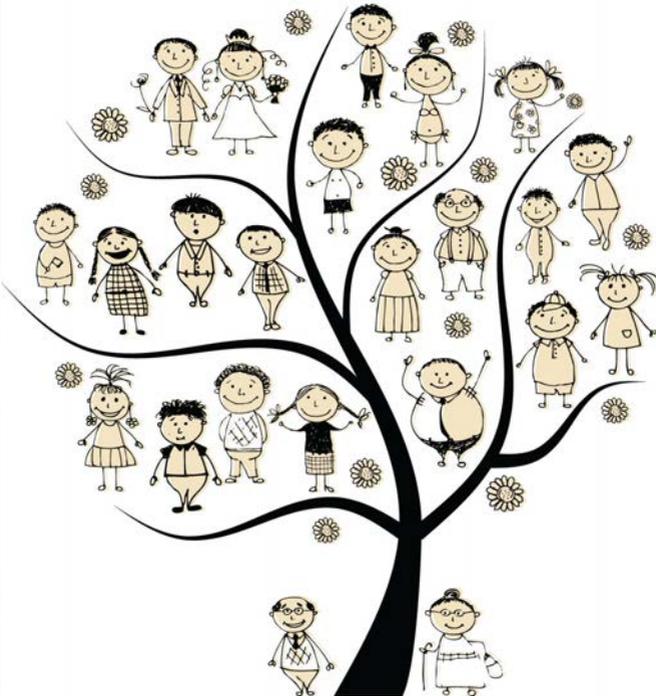
Together we will see the roots of faith growing deeper into the lives of our children and young people. While there are no silver bullets and no guarantees, the wise saying in Proverbs 22:6 is more likely to become a reality.

*“Start children off on the way they should go,  
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”*

(New International Version)

*“Point your kids in the right direction—  
when they’re old they won’t be lost.”*

(The Message)





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*“Religion never  
thoroughly penetrates  
life until it becomes  
domestic.”* <sup>33</sup>

*Horace Bushnell*

# CHAPTER 7

*Not the end ... just the beginning*

In an age of relativism, it is more important than ever for households to explore faith together, finding ways to put faith into action in the family and in the community. This should happen as naturally as Moses describes in Deuteronomy 6:7: around meal tables, driving in the car to activities, walking together, etc. More conversation - less arguments. More praying together – less preaching. More ‘we’ – less ‘us’ and ‘them’. Fewer programs – but more intentionality.

*Imagine* every home growing in its primary role of becoming a discipleship and missional centre.

*Imagine ...*

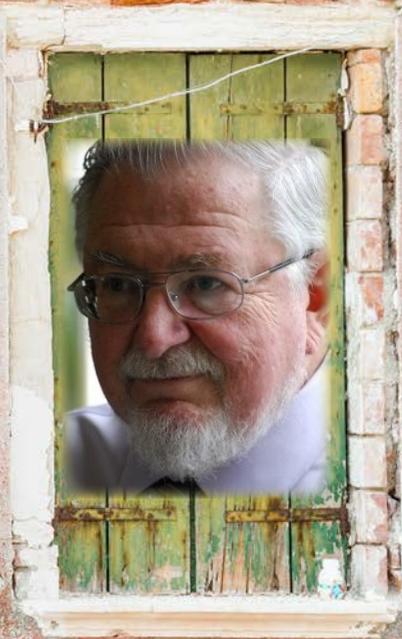
*“Write these commandments that I’ve given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates.”*

Deut. 6:6-9 (The Message)



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*“Where there is love that communicates belonging, a respect that invites participation, a sharing that facilitates modeling, common activities that demand Christian interpretation of life, and a trust that encourages responsible choice, there is a relational context in which faith can be born, and grow, and flower.”<sup>34</sup>*



*Lawrence Richards*

## CHAPTER 8

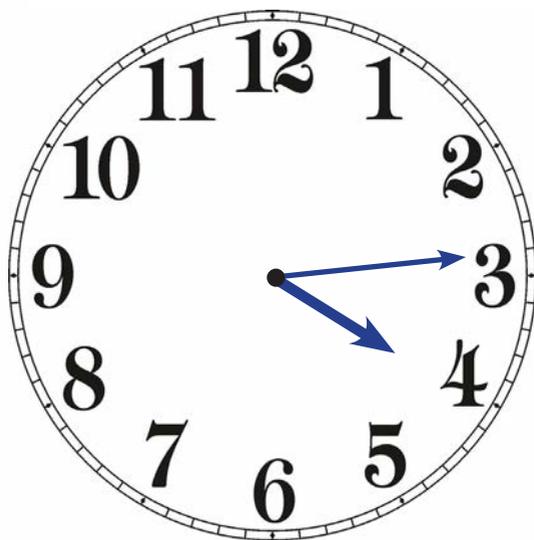
*The 4:14 invitation*

*“<sup>13</sup>Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.*

*<sup>14</sup>After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them.*

***Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”***

Nehemiah 4



Will you join the growing community of people who have set their watch alarms for **4:14** every day (you choose am or pm!) to follow Nehemiah’s call from long ago and battle in prayer for your family, for the families in your community, in your nation, in the world. Pray that God’s Spirit will breathe life into homes across the world in a way that builds His people and transforms this world.

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”*

Colossians 4:2

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*“Our formation has often been boring because it has lacked the connection to our deepest embodied, lived, and emotive experiences.”<sup>35</sup>*



*Andrew Root*

## CHAPTER 9

*Where did they say that?*

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- 35 "Faith Formation in a Secular Age", Andrew Root. Baker Publishing Gp. ©2017 p8

*In the fast paced world of today, when so much of our thinking is shaped by scanning and swiping and reading just 147 characters, this small 32 page book has been deliberately created as a manageable read.*

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