

# Shepherding parents

## What do your parents think parenting is?

“The Task of Parenting: The central job of parents is to prepare and equip their children not only to enjoy all that is good in life but also to successfully navigate, endure, and overcome difficulties in their personal life journeys in the world. Good parents provision their children with the grounding, learning, and resources they will need to surmount life’s difficulties and come out stronger and truer on the other side. How parents do this will be shaped a lot by their own experience growing up in their families. Parents may simply enjoy their offspring as children, but the true quality of their parenting work will be tested when their children face life’s trials and tribulations down the road. The demanding task of parenting is made especially difficult by two major complications: parents must never violate their children’s ultimate self-determination nor trigger teenage rebellion. These demand that parents carefully navigate the narrow, difficult straits between lax and overbearing parenting” <sup>1</sup>

## An alternative success criteria?

“These parents have faced the scary truth that they have no power at all to produce anything in their children. Because of this they haven’t attached their definition of successful parenting to a catalogue of horizontal outcomes. Successful parenting is not first about what you’ve produced; rather, it’s first about what you have done. Let me say it this way: successful parenting is not about achieving goals (that you have no power to produce) but about being a usable and faithful tool in the hands of the One who alone is able to produce good things in your children” <sup>2</sup>

## The building blocks

- **Ephesians 6: 1-4** Parents are given a specific role. So are children. There is a particular equipping of Dads and Mums that is needed.
- **1 Timothy 5: 1,2** The church is the Big family to surround the little family. There is a vital role for the wider church, particularly for those who have gone before, but also for younger folk.
- **It is where ministry is happening.** More than 50% of the UK church say they came to faith before 11. 75% before 18. <sup>3</sup>
- **The next generation enjoy church but they’re not always developing faith.** Our young people may continue to attend church until they leave home, but there is a moment of discovery when they arrive in a new area.

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, “Handing down the Faith” (Oxford University Press, 2021), p26

<sup>2</sup> Paul David Tripp, “Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles” (Crossway, 2016), p19

<sup>3</sup> ‘Mapping practising Christians’, p7 at <https://talkingjesus.org/research/previous-research> and ‘Talking Jesus’, p31 at <https://talkingjesus.org/research>

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## Where are you at?<sup>4</sup>

1. **Nothing to see here.** No C&Y ministry happens. There are few or no families. The only way is up!
2. **Seen but not heard.** There are families but no provision, acknowledgement or welcome. What is the leadership's attitude to C&Y?
3. **Let me entertain you.** Some C&Y provision. Little meaningful discipleship is happening in the church or at home. If you are honest is it mostly in place to enable adult ministry to happen without disturbance?
4. **It's all about church.** Great energy goes into the Sunday ministry. Discipleship happens for these 1-3 hours a week. What would parents say is their role in nurturing faith? How do they feel about their role? How can the conversation between/with parents be encouraged?
5. **Let's do this together.** C&Y are being discipled at church and at home. How much would the whole church be encouraged by the C&Y and own their discipleship? Do the C&Y view it as *their* church, of which they are an integral part?
6. **Helping them thrive.** Parents are the lead disciplers of their children. The church is united in support. The discipleship of C&Y has leadership passion, planning, goals and oversight as with adults. Could a 3/5 year plan be developed? Is there a robust pipeline so that when a parent with a baby arrives, the family's discipleship has an understood route ahead? Is this situation built on the genius of one or two people, or is it embedded into the life/leadership/culture of the church?

**Stories carry Vision.** Tell stories or interview someone from your church (or someone else's) that represent the Vision you have. Allow people to feel what 'better' can be. If families can do it, then they can as well.

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<sup>4</sup> "Children's Faith: A whole church approach to family ministry" from the Kitchen Table Project. [www.kitchentable.org.uk](http://www.kitchentable.org.uk)

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## This side of glory...

### Parents

- 'I don't have enough time': Can we give them a Vision for how the conversations and problems they already have can be transformed by Christ?
- 'I don't know where to start': Do they realise that no one has got it sorted?
- 'I don't have the answers': Welcome to the Christian life! Ask your child what they think. It's a long term game. Welcome conversations.
- 'I am not a good example': Welcome to the family. We only need one good example. He is the Messiah. Do parents know what it feels like to be a pastor?
- 'Sorry. He's an exceptional footballer': Passion finds a way (in nurturing faith as well)

### Children & Young people

- 'I don't want to go to church': Do we know why? Is it all on the parents? How much do the parents value church?
- Discipline, poor behaviour, differing expectations: Its big. Parents are frequently passionate. Grace and gentleness. We live to serve each other. Outward good behaviour is not the goal of the Christian life. Clarity on discipline in classes is always helpful
- Special needs and disability: Don't be the next institution that makes them feel like outsiders. Imagine it is your child. There is expertise, but normally it is just listening that is needed.
- 'I have no friends': High likely. How can she be feel valued? How can he serve?

### C&Y Ministry

- 'We don't have enough leaders': Honestly, no exaggeration... *No one does*. Don't ever recruit from the front. Empower others to recruit. Create a culture where the roles are valued. What is your nuclear button?
- 'We can't find the right person to employ': I am sorry. The pipeline for recruitment, training & retention is broken. There is no secret army out there.

**What would you add to this list?**

**What do you wish parents in your church understood?**

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## Practical ideas for next steps

### Leadership & Vision

- Leadership alignment on the role of the church and the role of the parents in raising children.
- Keep casting the Vision for parents. 'We want to be a church where...'
- Are there some parents who could be *Parenting Ambassadors*? A godly point of contact, given permission to ask loving questions who can help advise you on a strategy.
- Testimony in church to help us understand what '*normal*' looks like and what 'raising the bar' could be. Ensure they mention the barrier you see in your church. How do they solve it?
- Which church spaces lack children and young people?
- Can we recruit and invest more in key team leaders in the C&Y ministry?

### Practically speaking... (*This is not about you! Be careful to keep your eyes on the prize*)

- A parents' lunch after/before a service. Pick an issue/topic and then do the 3 D's (*Discover* what the world is saying. *Discern* what the Bible says. *Decide* what you think).
- A season where the whole church is swept up in a spiritual advance (sermons, Sunday school, youth group, family devotionals, corporate prayer, mission) [For instance "Meals with Jesus" book and free Sunday School resource from our website]
- Where can children and young people serve in ways that are actually needed? Which ministry teams could support a younger member?
- Which young people could be invited to the prayer meeting or to join a home group? These events might need to adapt, but who wouldn't want young people sat next to them contributing?
- 1:6. Could older folk be adopted as Grandparents for particular families? Could students be adopted as big brothers and sisters? Could single folk be adopted as uncles and aunts?
- What else?

## Do you leave with a next step, a thought to ponder or a conversation to have?

### Recommended resources:

Raising Confident Kids by Ed Drew

Faith in Kids podcast for parents

Parenting by Paul Tripp

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