

The Greatest Untapped Evangelistic Opportunity

Before the Modern Church

Scott Brown

I believe that we are involved in the greatest evangelistic opportunity before the church today: the salvation of millions of children under the evangelistic and discipleship ministry of fathers and mothers in the home. This is not the only mission field, to be sure, but it is perhaps the most neglected mission field before the church in our time.

The Bible calls fathers to preach the gospel to their children everyday, when they “sit in their house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down and when they rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). A father is to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation. He is commanded to expose his children day by day to the greatness of God, the perfections of His ways, and the great stories that explain His nature and character. This kind of instruction gives children a true understanding of the gospel.

Consider the Evangelistic Impact of Faithful Fathers

Think of the evangelistic impact that we as fathers would have in our generation if we would only heed this command. Consider the example of the faithful father: Daily, he praises God to his children with hundreds of words and practical principles. Day after day, he cries out to them, explaining the stories that glorify the kindnesses of God, His wrath toward sinners, and His vanquishing power over all things. In so doing, he reflects the heart of the Heavenly Father who cries out, “Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion”***(Hebrews 3:7-11).

In turn, his children observe their father as he personally delights in the Word and places himself under its wonderful teaching. They behold how good and mighty God is and how foolish it is to turn away from Him. They see how their daddy is comforted and confronted by it and is changed before their eyes.

Under this kind of loving and happy ministry, children hear the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation. They see the flow of history from God’s perspective. They hear of the great doctrines of the faith which have sustained humble people from one generation to the next. They observe the mighty hand of God working against all human odds. They see the beginning and the end of history and where they themselves stand in its stream. They know who wins the battle. They know that nothing can stand against the will of our Sovereign Lord.

Contrast the Results: Big-Tent Discipleship Falls Short

How different this is compared to sending your children to an evangelistic crusade or a concert in the hope that they might be saved.

The story is all too common: a young person goes to a Christian concert and walks down the aisle or makes a profession of faith absent a real conversion. They go forward because

they have an emotional response or a guilty conscience or perhaps because a friend went down — but not because they really understand the gospel. This is why so few who “make decisions” at evangelistic meetings ever continue in a normal Christian life. Without the background understanding of sin and repentance or the specifics of the life they are turning toward, they are like the seeds that fell on the shallow soil that sprouted up and died away because they had no root in themselves.

Sadly, our churches are filled with young people who have “walked an aisle,” but who have never really understood the full breadth of the gospel message. For them, the gospel has been trivialized and reduced to simply “accepting Christ.” In contrast to this, the daily diet of a father’s gospel teaching gives a detailed understanding of the gospel. It provides both the context and content that is necessary to become a true follower of Christ.

Rebellion Against God’s Clear Commands to Fathers

God’s requirements for child evangelism are clear: fathers are commanded to diligently teach their children and care for their souls day by day. The sad reality of father’s lives in modern churches is that they are satisfied with Sunday schools and evangelistic crusades (which are never mentioned or commanded in scripture), but they reject God’s direct and undeniable commands to personally teach their children daily. This is outright rebellion against the Lord.

Unfortunately, many fathers continue on in their rebellion because they feel good about their efforts, especially when they compare their parenting practices to their pastor and Christian brothers. Fathers often feel great about their involvement in their children’s lives because, rather than defining faithful fathering by what scripture prescribes, they define exemplary fatherhood as going to the kid’s recitals and games and getting them into a good Sunday school or youth group.

In order to rescue this lost generation of children in Christian homes from hell, we must first help fathers understand what God has commanded and exhort them to embrace their responsibilities before the Lord. We must speak clearly of what God has mandated so that fathers do not miss the opportunity to touch the hearts of their sons and daughters with the message of the gospel.

Wake Up! We ARE Losing the Next Generation

Because fathers have failed to do their duty in discipling their children, we are losing the next generation to the world. Observations from a number of studies illustrates this trend. Consider the following:

Researcher George Barna maintains that if current trends in the belief systems and practices of the younger generation continue, in ten years, church attendance will be half the size it is today.[1]

Dawson MacAlister, national youth ministry specialist, remarked that 90% of youth active in high school church programs drop out of church by the time they are sophomores on college.[2]

Data from the Southern Baptist Convention indicates that we are currently losing 70-88% of our youth after their freshman year in college. [3] In a report to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, T.C. Pinkney observed that 70% of teenagers involved in church youth groups stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation.[4] The Southern Baptist Council on Family Life**reported an even more staggering statistic — that 88% of the children in evangelical homes leave church at the age of 18.[5]

Those Who Understand the Gospel by Age Group

While church attendance is one barometer for generational continuity for the gospel in the church, another study points to a more fundamental problem. Thom Rainer, Professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary School of Evangelism launched a survey that he hoped would tell him if people understood the gospel. In response to his survey questions, the following percentages of people answered in a way that would indicate they were born again:[6]

Born before 1946 — 65%

Born between 1946 and 1964 — 35%

Born between 1965 and 1976 — 15%

Born between 1976 and 1994 — 4%

Consider the Enormous Leverage of Fathers for Evangelism

Of all the studies recently published, the most telling related to the fathers role in discipleship is this: according to a report published by The Baptist Press [7] if a child is the first person in the household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability everyone in the household will follow. If the mother is first, there is a 17% chance everyone else in the household will submit to Christ. Here's the clincher: If the father professes Christ first, there is a 93% probability that everyone else in the house will heed the Gospel call.

Pray for an Uprising of Men

God's Word declares and studies affirm what this generation needs — an uprising of men committed to discipling their children.

While the church in the twenty-first century is losing the next generation of children to worldliness, we at the NCFIC are encouraging fathers to return to the biblical role as the head of the household and to preach the gospel and make disciples of their children. We are also encouraging church leaders to have the courage to cancel the programs which steal the father's creation-order role and put their energy into fulfilling the clear commands of God.

The great Messianic prophesy of Psalm 22 shows how God brings the glory of salvation from one generation to the next through those who take seriously the charge to teach their children:

A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this. (Psalm 22:30-31)

Please pray that we as fathers would not miss the greatest untapped evangelistic opportunity before the church today. Let it be said of this generation of fathers that we did our part to fulfill the Great Commission.

May we preach the fullness of the gospel to our households and give our children a thousand reasons to believe.

1. Barna, George, Revolution (Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 2005), p. 48-49
2. McNeal, Reggie, The Present Future (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2003), p. 4.
3. Pinkney, T.C., Remarks to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, Nashville, Tennessee, September 18, 2001.
4. Ibid.
5. Southern Baptist Council on Family Life report to Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2002.
6. The Present Future, p. 4.
7. House, Polly, "Want Your Church to Grow? Then Bring in Men," www.bpnews.net
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