

Equipping Parents to Teach and Lead Their Children

By Mike Sciarra

At Grace Church we love families and seek to follow Jesus as biblically-based households. We desire that families are built up and people are reached with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ in every context in which they engage with God and other believers. This article is meant to encourage the Body of Christ by answering three common questions: What does it mean to equip parents? How are we equipping parents at Grace? And how does equipping parents to teach and lead their children fit with having church-based children's and youth ministry?

By God's design parents are to be the primary encouragers of their children's spiritual growth as they teach them the Bible, pray with and for them, and prepare them for life (Deut. 6:4-9); bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). God wants the faith to be passed on from generation to generation (Ps. 78:1-8).

What does it mean to "equip parents"?

First, "equipping parents" means that God is equipping parents to do what He calls them to do. What God calls us to do; He also equips and enables us to do by His Word applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. 1 Thess. 2:13 says "We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." God is working in those He has saved by grace through faith in Christ, as Philippians 1:6 says "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ", and Philippians 2:13 says "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God's Word is the primary equipping tool God uses, as 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Second, in tandem with His Word, God also uses other believers in our lives to teach and mentor. In a local church context, this means that fellow believers as well as church leadership (pastors, elders and other ministry leaders) take seriously the Biblical mandate for parents to be the primary teachers and disciplers of their children. The church's role is to provide a support for the spiritual development in the life of the family. We count it a privilege to come alongside parents and assist them in their God-given roles. We are fellow-travelers, trusting God and learning together with those He has entrusted to us and called us to shepherd. As leadership we aim to teach, mentor and encourage as God leads; highlighting what the Bible teaches as well as sharing things we have learned (1 Thess. 2:7-8 basically, sharing our lives and God's Word with others).

Third, "equipping parents" means that parents will be eager to look for and seek out opportunities to learn from God and others God has put in their lives. God has made the process pretty simple: older, more seasoned believers are to come alongside younger ones and teach and mentor them (Titus 2). Older men are to teach younger men; older women are to teach younger women. The ministry of pastors and teachers in the local church is important in the process, being given by God to the church to "equip the saints for works

of service” (Eph. 4:11-12). These “works of service” ought to start first and foremost in their own homes, to those God has given them to shepherd and make disciples of.

Basically, equipping parents is a multi-faceted process, where there is personal interaction and engagement. The process assumes the God-dependent, God-confident, humble desire of church leaders and other believers to help others by their teaching and example, as well as the desire of parents to benefit from the wisdom and experience others have gained. It assumes that those who teach are willing to prepare and engage in the process and others are willing to seek out and receive instruction and interact with those they are learning from. Leaders want others to benefit as they do what God has called them to do in home and church settings. Parents want to learn from others who have gathered helpful experience, resources and tools to pass on. When things work the way God designed them good things happen!

It is helpful when teaching is followed by dialog, having an ongoing conversation with parents who may be wrestling with certain concepts they are unfamiliar with or unaccustomed to. We want to gain understanding of Biblical teachings, as well as understand where there is room for differences of opinion. While we seek to know what the Bible has to say about an issue, we want to have unity in essentials and allow diversity in non-essentials (areas where sincere and intelligent Christians often disagree), as we seek to do what God has called us to do and move in the direction He is leading us.

How are we equipping parents at Grace?

The leadership of Grace Church recognizes that parents are the primary spiritual leaders of their children’s faith. Because the Holy Spirit is the one that causes spiritual growth we rely on God’s leading and working in the life of each family. We strive to do this through the preaching of the gospel and creating an environment which is most conducive for growing Christ-centered homes; seeking to support marriages, parents and family life to the glory of God. We seek to balance age-integrated and age-segregated ministry times and encourage, equip and enable households to engage in spiritual growth activities like worship, learning and serving together. Therefore, we seek to equip parents in their Biblical roles and responsibilities in a variety of ways.

1. **Preaching and teaching** that applies God’s Word not only to individuals, but also to family and church life, including parents’ roles and responsibilities in the home. Ongoing encouragement from the pulpit to parents that what God calls us to do He enables us to do by the power of the Holy Spirit. Encouragement to worship together as households, to learn together in various intergenerational settings, and to serve the Lord and reach out together.
2. **Ongoing teaching and equipping times** for both men and women (weekly men’s and women’s Bible studies and accountability groups, monthly men’s breakfast; etc.). These provide opportunities for in-depth, ongoing teaching, where various ideas, practices and views can be developed and explained in greater detail. We encourage older men to mentor younger men and older women to mentor younger women (Titus 2). Family home groups can also be an equipping time where

parents see modeled what can happen on a daily basis. We share our lives and God's Word with one another (1 Thess. 2:7-8) as we engage on an ongoing basis.

3. **Offering periodic classes and seminars** that give parents hands-on opportunities to hear and put into practice what they are learning, such as: "Shepherding Your Child's Heart" series by Tedd Tripp; various other seminars such as "Playing Catch with Your Kids", "Teaching Children to Worship", and others. These times offer opportunity to discuss and interact with other parents, processing information and asking questions.
4. **Making family discipleship tools available** for parents to use (devotional booklets at Christmas and Easter, the weekly "Take 5" bookmark in the bulletin, newsletter articles, articles sent to parents, web links to resources, articles on the Grace website [www.graceorange.org], etc). We suggest books like "Age of Opportunity" by Paul Tripp (a Biblical guide to parenting teens) and "Uniting Church and Home" by Eric Wallace, in addition to others. Good resources can be a great way to personally study, as well as pass on helpful insights to others.

Above all, God is the primary teacher and equipper. As we trust Him daily, listen to His Word and speak to Him in prayer, He teaches us. He uses others in the process as well.

How does equipping parents to teach and lead their children fit with having church-based children's and youth ministry?

God has ordained the home and the church as the two primary institutions for faith-building. The two go hand in hand. It is a partnership between the church and home. We seek to balance age-integrated and age-specific ministry times. We desire to unite church and home in the process of Christian growth and nurture in as many ways possible. Therefore, we encourage multiple generations to interact at home, church and community and we have ministries focused on certain age groupings.

Why do we encourage parents to teach and lead their children?

- We do so because the Bible shows the pattern for the faith being passed on from parent to child (Deut. 6:4-9; Ps. 78:1-8; Ps. 127:1-5; 2 Chron. 20:13).
- We want to fulfill the great command (to love God) and the great commission (to make disciples) in and through present and future generations.
- We want to equip the saints for works of service (Eph. 4:11-12), first and foremost in their own homes, as well as the church and the world.
- God intends both church and family to carry out evangelism and discipleship through multiple generations (Deut. 6:2; Neh. 8:1-8, Luke 1:50).
- The people of God are to be equipped for spiritual ministry and maturity through family-based, heart-level relationships, and by preparing heads of households (primarily fathers) to be servant-leaders in the family and church (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- The Church's relationships reach across generations and are nurtured primarily through daily lifestyle discipleship, especially parents training their families and living the gospel in service to the body and witness in the world (Eph. 5:21-6:4).

Why do we have church-based ministries for children and youth?

- We want to fulfill the great command (to love God) and the great commission (to make disciples) in and through present and future generations.
- God intends both church and family to carry out evangelism and discipleship through multiple generations (Deut. 6:2; Neh. 8:1-8, Luke 1:50).
- We want to equip the saints for works of service (Eph. 4:11-12), first and foremost in their own homes, as well as the church and the world.
- We want to support the teaching of Christian parents by having other godly adults (who support what Christian parents teach) instruct them in the basics of the faith, further strengthening the foundation that is being built in the home.
- We want to teach children & youth to respect & honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-3).
- To give opportunities for children and youth to build community and cultivate relationships with their peers through healthy interaction and friendship building.
- To reach out to young people who are unbelievers and/or whose parents are not believers (Matt. 28:18-20).

Conclusion

We are so blessed and excited to be working with such a great group of parents at Grace! Take heart, you are not alone! We all continue to learn and grow in our understanding as well as our practice of Biblical principles as they relate to our roles as believers, teachers, spouses and parents. We are learning along with you. We encourage you, along with us, to seek out and take advantage of the various opportunities to be equipped in your Biblical roles and responsibilities.

Many tools and resources are available (and we are constantly looking for other effective and helpful resources). We also encourage you to share your needs, concerns and challenges so that we can better equip you “for works of service”, as you endeavor to fulfill your God-given roles to the glory of God. We, as your fellow-travelers, are thankful and excited to be on the journey with you. We want to encourage parents in their God-given roles by engaging in a process of mutual learning and accountability, trusting God to do what He wants in and through us.

What God calls us to do; He will enable and equip us to do by His Spirit, through His Word, for His glory!