

going deeper study guide

orange: combined forces

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

*“You can always do more in collective prayer than you
could ever do in individual prayer”*

Tony Evans



Partnership Has It's Privileges

If you Google the phrase “benefits of partnership” you get nearly 250 million hits. That’s a quarter-billion pages that deal with the upside of partnering. What that tells me is that a) the internet is just ridiculously ginormous! and b) that a whole lot of people believe that partnerships are a good thing.

Q :: Name some kinds of partnerships we can enter into. Discuss what we gain from each partnership that we would not otherwise get – and what we lose or give up.

Q :: What would you think are essential ingredients in a successful partnership?

Q :: What are some reasons that a partnership might fail?

From what I’ve seen, the most common thought when defining the word partnership, leans toward the business entity meaning, where an entity is formed of two groups with shared risk and profit. When we talk about the church partnering with families it’s not hard to draw parallels with this definition. Partnerships are sought after, particularly in the business world, when the greatest potential for success is brought about by leveraging and tapping into the strength of another entity. However, it must be noted that BOTH parties bring something to the table. If I am in a partnership and I’m the only one getting something of value, then I’ve become a consumer – I am no longer a partner. Consider the scripture quoted above. Two are not better than one because one is benefitting from the work of the other. No, two are better than one because they are BOTH working, and their multiplied efforts are what brings the good return.

With that in mind, let’s apply this to the church partnering with families. To be blunt: what are we bringing to the table? If we bring nothing to the table, then we’re not partners but consumers. Reminds me of this quote I wrote down and just came across again:

*“What scares me is the anti-intellectual, anti-critical thinking philosophy that has spilled over into the church. This philosophy tends to romanticize the faith, making the local church into an ‘experience center’. Their concept of church is that they’re consumers, and that the church’s job is to meet their felt needs.” -- Bill Hull in *Right Thinking**

Yes, the church wants to partner with families – especially those with children at home. And yes, that means the church provides ministry that is tailored specifically and intentionally to that goal. But in a partnership both parties share the risk, the profits – and the work. I will be so bold as to say that this means that my family does more than just show up.

I checked thesaurus.com to get an expanded view of the term partnership. Interestingly, that site lists the definition as “alliance; participation”. I love that. Inherent in the meaning is the idea that there is a role for me.

Q :: In our church, as a family with children at home, what does “doing our part” in this shared work look like?

Q :: What about those who have successfully raised their children, and are great examples of families who did it right? What might their “participation” look like?

That last question leads me down another little trail. Bear with me.

We have studied, been taught, and talked about the dangers of living just in our Christian bubble; surrounding ourselves with only other Christians and effectively sealing ourselves off from the world. This sounds wonderfully spiritual in one sense. However, doing this not only seals us (and our families) from the corrupting influence of the world, but it seals the world from the redemptive and loving influence of Christ living in and through us.

Now, my guess is that there’s not a lot of disagreement to this point on this. However, here’s a little monkey wrench I had not thought of before. We can even have a bubble inside a bubble. Here’s what I mean by that. The ways that the church ministers to families shows up in many ways, but it’s done at it’s most intimate level via Life Groups. Here’s the problem though. Life Groups are mostly organized around what’s referred to as an “age and stage” model. You partner (there’s that word again) with other people who you have a lot in common with in terms of your age and where you are in life (small kids at home, empty nesters, singles, etc.). This is great in so many ways – however, it shares the downside of the Christian bubble: a sealing off. Young people with children absolutely need to be there for each other in a way that only someone also going through the same thing can identify with and minister to. But what is lost is the opportunity for someone who has already successfully navigated those waters to bring a redemptive and encouraging influence to bear.

Personally, I would love to see some sort of mentoring program setup whereby young families can be connected to an older couple that can support them, one-on-one, family-to-family, in a way that others in their age and stage could not – because they’ve done it. Being that such a program is not in place, I think that multi-generational Life Groups would also be a great idea. Sunday mornings at 11:00 we have such a Life Group. It’s disguised as an Adult Bible Class named Going Deeper - but make no mistake, it is a multi-generational Life Group. I learn constantly – both from those older than me, and from those younger than me. And, yes, it would be accurate to read this as both a plug for the class and an invitation to join us.

All that being said, we all (no matter what age or stage we find ourselves) have a role to play – and that could very well mean getting outside of our comfort zone (and any bubble we may be in) and being proactive in finding – or even creating – ways that we can contribute to the mission.

Our Mission & the Influence Vacuum

One of the reasons partnerships go south is that there is no longer a clear, shared vision of what the mission is. Providing the mission hasn’t changed, it’s important that everyone in the partnership not lose sight of it’s importance. Let’s talk about “mission” for a moment. If you’re a follower of Christ, you have one. Whether you go to Kingsway, some other church, or even no church at all. Jesus gave us a mission. -- Read Matthew 28:18-20

It’s just my opinion, but I think a lot of Christians have, historically, misread this. I say because I know I did. I think what we read in v. 19 is “Therefore go and make converts of all nations.” or perhaps “Therefore go and make believers of all nations.” But it actually says “Therefore go and make *disciples* of all nations.”

Q :: What’s the difference in making a convert or a believer and making a disciple? What’s involved in each

Q :: Does a misreading of this verse make a difference? In what ways?

Now let's look at Kingsway's stated mission:

Kingsway exists to honor God by equipping spiritually distracted families to become passionate followers of Christ

See that? Our mission as a church fits so well with the Great Commission in Matthew 28. We don't exist to make converts (though that is most certainly important – and necessary). But we're about helping families become "passionate followers of Christ". That, dear friends, is a disciple-making.

Q :: Note the difference, however, in that Jesus' commission was to go into the world, and Kingsway's is centered in the home. Why do you think that is?

Q :: What does a family becoming a PASSIONATE follower of Christ look like? And describe what the potential impact of that could be - both on a *family-unit* level and on an *individual family member* level.

Do you see how starting this passionate fire in our own home can spread so that it impacts on the greater call to make disciples of "all nations"? If we are to have a positive influence in the world, that influence needs to have a home base – and not just the church home, but our own. We need to be participants in our own deliverance, development, growth and impact on the world around us.

And remember we can only pour out what has first been poured in. There's a reason that the term "spiritually distracted families" is in Kingsway's mission. It is most certainly not by accident. There is competition for our attention, and a culture – and an enemy – that waits in the wings, eager to pour into us – to be an influence in our lives. If we have a positive influence vacuum, it will not go unfilled for long.

Q :: What messages exist in our culture that run contrary to what we would have if the church is that which pours into our families?

Q :: How does this impact us being able to positively influence others? Both in terms of us operating out of a positive influence vacuum – and those in our spheres of influence doing the same?

Conclusion (a testimony of how this really works):

Rather than a typical conclusion I would write here, I wanted to share how this looks, on a very personal level, when this partnership between the church and the family functions as intended.

Our oldest daughter was having a very difficult issue in her life. It was affecting her greatly. It was a problem that has been going on for over a year, and showed no sign of changing. Her tears and frustration led to frustration from my wife and me as well. We grappled with the possibility of a fairly drastic (for us, at last) solution. Ultimately, we decided (through the suggestion of someone speaking up boldly – and believe me, I wish I had time to go deep into the impact of doing just that) to let the decision rest with our daughter. She is very wise (often very much beyond her years) and we wanted her to wrestle through this. She started a pros and cons list and wanted input. We said that we would love to help work through that, but this needed to start off as HER list. We wanted to help lead her - without telling her what to do.

We encouraged her to seek counsel from other Christians. She did that. All she talked to promised to pray for her. Some however, were bolder than that (again, if only we had the time to unpack that). I've heard Kingsway describe a benefit of the partnership between the church and the families is that parents can have another voice speaking the same things into their life that we, as parents, are. That is what we found. Several folks really stepped up and asked questions that pushed her to really process things even further. None of it was with an agenda. All of it was incredibly helpful. Some were things I either had said or wanted to say, and having it come from a trusted source OTHER than me or my wife was so impactful that it's hard to describe.

I'm left with great thanks for a place where this happens – not by accident, but by design.

And I'm left with a question that I hope we can all echo. How I be that person in the life of another family?