**Partners**

I read about a couple in FL who were doing an extraordinary job of teaching their sons the ins and outs of their family business. It turns out the family business was armed robbery. These parents taught their boys

         how to use an AK-47 rifle

         how to listen to a police scanner including the codes officers use

         how to surveil a target and reconnoiter an escape route

         evasion and survival techniques

         how to memorize maps

         hand-to-hand combat

After each robbery they committed on a family outing they debriefed the kids, identifying mistakes made and correcting errors. I think that mother and father are despicable, but I’ll give them credit, they were serious about preparing their children for what they believed to be important.

Isn’t that one of the primary responsibilities of parents, to instruct our children in important life skills?

Parents do well to teach their children…

         Basic hygiene

         Proper manners

         How to build bridges to other people

         Work ethic

As Christians, along with teaching life skills, we also seek to teach the importance of walking in the way of God, to love and worship Jesus.

You may not think that’s most important. I hope you do. If you believe the Gospel, that we’re all sinners and the only way to eternal life is through Jesus, what could be more important?

This morning I want you to think about this: What have you decided that you intend to teach your kids? What specifically do you want them to learn and know?

If I teach my children so they gain the whole world yet they forfeit their souls, what good would that be to them? There will be a day when Jesus…*is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done*. (Matthew 16:26f)

As important as it is that I teach my children the way of the world, there is nothing more important than that I teach them how…*to walk humbly with our God.* Micah 6:8

29 times in the Old Testament God commanded His people, *You must walk in my ways*. The Psalms and Proverbs and the Prophets routinely speak of God’s people walking in His ways.

Can you think of anything more important than teaching your children to walk in the ways of God? Is that not the greatest responsibility of a parent?

Let’s consider this responsibility from two perspectives, first from that of parents, especially fathers, and second from that of the church.

When God established Israel in their homeland He told them how to walk in His ways. He specifically urged if not commanded parents to teach their children to walk in God’s way. God wanted them to do more with His Word than have pictures of the Ten Commandments framed and hung on the wall.

I’m going to read this text. As I do I want you to notice two ideas:

         One is that we’re commanded to create ways to remember God’s words. Notice the different or mnemonic techniques suggested to help us remember.

         Two, notice that God specifically commands us to teach His ways to our children.

***Fix*** *these words of mine in your hearts and minds.* ***Tie*** *them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* ***Teach*** *them to your children,* ***talking*** *about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* ***Write*** *them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.* Deuteronomy 11:18-21

During prayer Jewish men would wear a phylactery or “tephillin”, a small leather box containing tiny scroll of with four written passages, Exodus 13:1-1, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-31. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls were found examples of phylacteries.

The key was not to wear the phylactery. What mattered was knowing God’s ways.

“*Teach them to your children*” is not just God’s command, although that should be enough, it’s also logic. The world is not going to teach our children to walk in the ways of God.

It’s part of the sinful nature of man that we tend toward following our own ways. So if our children are going to follow God, we have to teach them. They will not just pick it up. We have to be specific.

Your kids will pick a lot of your behaviors, like what to say when you stub your toe, how to show your displeasure when another driver does something stupid in front of you, or what to say when you see something amazing, “*Holy* ---“. But if you want them to learn to walk in God’s ways you have to teach them.

We know that parental involvement in education greatly enhances a child’s chances of being successful:

         A child who is a good reader was usually read to in his mother’s or father’s arms.

         A child who is excited about learning usually has parents who are excited about learning.

         A child who sees the value of playing by the rules usually has parents who value playing by the rules.

         A child who believes it’s important to walk in the ways of God usually has parents who believe it’s important to walk in the ways of God.

How important is it to learn to walk in the ways of God? Read how God finished His instructions about teaching His ways, *I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God*. Deuteronomy 11:26-28

Your decision to teach your children God’s ways results in the blessing. Failure to do so results in the curse unless God intervenes somehow.

A New Testament verse that speaks to this thought is Ephesians 6:4 where the Apostle says specifically to fathers, *do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*.

Dad, you play a critical role in your child learning to walk in the ways of God. Several years ago U.S. News & World Report, not exactly a family friendly magazine, concluded “*More than any other factor, a father’s presence in the family will determine a child’s success and happiness*.”

David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values wrote

around 1999, “*The most urgent domestic challenge facing the*

*United States at the close of the 20th century is the re-creation of fatherhood as a social role for men. A good father does three basic things: provides for his family, protects his family, and gives spiritual and moral guidance*.”

I couldn’t say it any better. **Gentlemen**, the responsibility is not ours exclusively, but it is ours first. We can raise our kids to have impeccable academic credentials;

         we can help them become superb athletes,

         we can give them a fine house to live in;

         we can give them every measure of worldly success,

but we may leave them with no concept of following God’s ways, of living for Him.

There is no greater gift we can give our children and grandchildren than to teach them to love and worship Jesus. The three best ways to teach our children to love and worship Jesus are first by example, second by example, and third by example. To bring up a child in the way he should go, travel that way yourself.

We teach…

         kindness by being thoughtful and gracious even at home.

         patience by being gentle and understanding over and over.

         honesty by keeping our word even when it costs.

         courage by living unafraid in faith and in all circumstances.

         justice by being fair and dealing equally with everyone.

Surveys have shown that children whose mother took them to church regularly have a 30% probability of continuing in faith as adults.

         Children whose father took them to church have a 70% probability of continuing in faith as adults.

         Children whose father and mother took them to church have an 80% probability of continuing in faith as adults.

We should take this very seriously. There’s no guarantee but ask parents who became Christian later in life if they wished they had taught their children to love and worship Jesus. They’ll tell you they wish they had started earlier.

Let me take a moment to promote our Men’s Retreat May 10-11. We’re going to talk about specific things we ought to be teaching our kids and grandkids so that they might become mature adults who love and worship Jesus.

*Teach these things to your children, talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

I encourage you to consider bringing your children to church as much or more important than taking them to school.

I said we would also think about this from the perspective of the church so let’s do. The church should partner with parents to teach our children.

The partnership of family and church has a tremendous influence on passing Christian faith from one generation to the next. There are things that you and only you can teach your kids, and there are things that the church can, and I think should help you with.

So I’ll to talk to our church, that’s all of us.

As I was working on this part of the sermon I was snacking on an apple. I intended to have carrot sticks but I forgot to bring them from home. As I gnawed my way to the core, the proper way to eat an apple, I remembered a quip I heard once, *You can count the seeds in an apple but you can’t count the apples in a seed*.

A little pocket knife surgery revealed there to be 5 seeds in my apple.

John Chapman lived from 1774 to 1845, his last years spent in Ft. Wayne. The Ft. Wayne Tin Caps minor league baseball team is named after him. You might know him as Johnny Appleseed. Chapman planted apple trees in Ontario, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. If you knew precisely how many apple seeds he planted, you still couldn’t know how many apples he’s responsible for.

Think of the implications of these few words, *you can’t count the apples in a seed*. Isn’t it inspiring to think that we can’t calculate how many souls we might reach with Gospel when we teach the young people in our church to love and worship Jesus? You may teach a class of two or three or fourteen, but how many will they touch?

As I stand here today I think you are what, 130 or so people. How many, with divine multiplication, does that mean I will reach?

Our vision statement and church motto is *Knowing and Growing in Christ*, taken from the Jesus commission to the church. Jesus said,

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus said, *Teach people to love and worship me*. He said He would be with us all the way. Now, He didn’t say anything about how to do it or how many we had to teach. He knew this principle.

You can count how many people you teach but you can’t count how many you will reach. You can’t know…

         How much spiritual fruit will they bear?

         How many individuals will each kid or adult reach?

You’re not reaching one kid. You’re reaching that kid and every one he reaches. The actual total of souls reached by your teaching is known only to God.

Think with me please. I’ll think out loud. You can just think along, OK?

         Who is responsible to do the teaching in a church?

         Who did Jesus tell to go and teach? Ben? Or Theresa? Or me?

Jesus said, *Go teach*! Who was He talking to? Did He mean just certain people like Elders or Deacons? Did He mean just people with special training?

A few weeks ago in our series on the book of Hebrews we read 5:11f. After writing about Jesus being our High Priest it says, *We*

*have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again.*

We made clear that this letter was written to church members just like us. Let me highlight one phrase, *by this time you ought to be teachers*. Doesn’t that sound like the author believed that Joe and Mary Christian should be teaching the God’s truths?

William Barclay was one of the premier Biblical commentators of all time. His comments on Hebrews 5:11f are rather uncomplimentary. Christians who ought to be teachers but are not he calls “*slow to learn*”.

Barclay translates νωθρος “*dull of hearing*”. More poignantly he describes νωθρος as being witless and senseless.

I can illustrate his explanation like this: One night back when I was police chaplain the officer I was with was dispatched to pick up a cat that had been hit be a car and it’s back broken? The animal was alive but in great pain and we could do nothing for it. We had to euthanize it.

Barclay would say νωθρος describes that cat. He applied it to Christians who ought to be teachers but are not because, as he wrote, they’re lazy.

Back to my point, Jesus gave this commission to the church, *Go make disciples, teaching them*. The writer of Hebrews obviously agreed with Jesus as he challenged the readers to grow in faith and knowledge so they can teach.

I draw two conclusions:

1.    The church should partner with parents to teach children the ways of God. Also we should teach adults.

2.    The responsibility of teaching is not limited to a few. It is all of our responsibility.

If the church is going to help you teach your children what it means to walk in the ways of God, as a church we need to have something to offer.

We’re putting special effort in 2019 to strengthen our children’s education department. I thank you for supporting hiring Theresa to full-time so that she can give maximum effort to organize and lead.

So far our offerings have met budget, allowing this to work.

And Theresa is doing more than we could have expected.

Many of you have stepped up to participate. You’re teachers or helpers; you’re hall monitors. We have quite a group of volunteers. We could always use more.

I love what Theresa wrote this week, *What a blessing to have so many volunteers. It's a larger blessing to have a need for more volunteers!*

Many hands make light work. The more of us who participate the less any one teacher has to do.

I wish to encourage you who are presently involved. Don’t quit. Don’t get tired. You don’t know how many you reach when you work with even one kid.

Jesus didn’t put a limit on how long we should be engaged in teaching. We shouldn’t either. Some of you have been teaching forever. I hope you will continue teaching forever.

I also wish to encourage and challenge you who are not presently involved. You’re not too old. You’re not too young. You’re not too new. You’re not too anything that should keep you from teaching.

Everyone one of us can be involved. Even if you already have other responsibilities within the church, you can still take a turn teaching. The more people who help the less any one person has to do.

I realize that some people are never going to be involved in teaching. You don’t feel it; you don’t like it; whatever. You are not and will not be a teacher. If that’s you I challenge you: go to Jesus in prayer and tell Him why you will not help.

I’m not making fun of anyone. I’m serious. Tell Jesus, *I can’t or won’t teach and here’s why*.

If you’re still comfortable not helping then perhaps you’ll accept this challenge: How about you increase the amount of money you give to this work so that someone else can do it? Maybe you can’t teach but you can help provide for those who do.

Harley and James were cousins, and partners. Harley’s father had founded a candle and soap making company that supplied soap to the U.S. Army during the Civil War.

Harley decided that their company should make a new creamy white soap, best on the market. He enlisted James, a chemist who developed a formula for what they called “White Soap” emphasizing its purity. It didn’t do very well.

One day Clem, the overseer of production forgot to turn off the mixing machine when he went to lunch. He returned an hour later to discover that too much air had been whipped into the soap. Not wanting to waste the product he poured it into the hardening forms and hoped for the best, thinking he might get fired.

When the bars of soap went out to the public there was immediate reaction. Consumers loved that “*the soap floated*”. It didn’t get lost under murky water. There was so much demand that the cousins changed the production method to purposely make floating soap.

They also changed the name of the soap borrowing from Psalm 45:8, *All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they make thee glad.* And so was born Ivory Soap.

The partnership of Harley Proctor and James Gamble continues today making cleaning and hygiene products. That’s the value of a good partnership.

There are things that you and only you can teach your kids, and there are things that the church can partner with you to teach. That partnership has immense spiritual value.

There are lots of children of all ages running around this church. Thank you for bringing them. You are showing them an example of what it means to love and worship Jesus.

Keep teaching them at home and keep bringing them here. We are partners in teaching your kids.