

**“WHAT KIDS NEED” - Part 1**  
Raising G Rated Children in an X Rated World  
Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16  
September 28, 2008

The culture is changing. Every year I come to that new reality when I go to the Galleria or a high school football game. There are all these kids interacting with one another, and I don't have a clue about what they are thinking, or what they are saying. I don't know or understand the music that most of them are singing. Fashions are foreign to me. And it all slaps me in the face that the culture is changing and I'm out of touch. But in many ways, kids don't change. They still like to test limits and push the envelope. That's not surprising. But what irritates me is that the edge where they begin to push is way beyond where I left it when I was pushing it. And so we are not in Mayberry any more. I went to my computer and typed in XXX. I had over 38 million hits. That is over 38 million web sites that deal with so called "adult" material. We live in the midst of an X-rated culture, and a lot of that culture is targeting our kids. How do we raise G-rated kids in an X-rated world?

It's not easy. You can write 'Difficult' on the top of your note page, because it is difficult to be a parent. And for a single parent, it has to be nearly impossible. It's tough to be a parent and so this is going to be a tough series. Our world has changed big time since we were little. And it will change a whole lot more by the time our children are in our position. And this is not just for parents. Empty nesters think they are off the hook because their kids have left home. But these days we have boomerang kids that come back again and again. This series is for you. And grandparents. You think that your job is to spoil your grandchildren and then you can send them back when you're tired of them, or when all the sugar you gave them starts to kick in. But this message is for you too, because you can have a tremendous influence on the life of those children. And for the brand new parents, welcome to a new world. I'm glad you're here. And I hope you will learn a lot along the way.

Even for those who have no kids, want no kids, don't want to be around kids, this will be good for you, too, because you are going to interact with kids on a regular basis. Of course I define a kid as anyone younger than myself, so we interact with kids a lot in life. We will look at these biblical principles in the context of a parent/child relationship, but it is for everyone.

Now I want to start with the disclaimer that I am not an expert on parenting. I used to be an expert, but then I actually had children of my own. Children are a lot easier to deal with in the abstract rather than in reality. So we will try to talk about the reality, and you can know that I am in this journey with you. And I am not going to spend a lot of time talking about our X-rated culture. You don't need me for that. Just look around. Watch some youth. Listen to some kids, and you will learn more than you need to know. We will not deal with how we got to this place in history, but how we can offer hope to people living in this time and place. It is hope that we need to lift up.

The bottom line is that we are in a battle for the family. There are some who say that the family as we know it doesn't even exist any more. That's not true. I do believe that the family is fragile and greatly in need of help, but I don't think it's over. And the reason I don't think it's over is because this is God's design. It's His idea. So if we look to God's desires for the family, if we put the biblical principles into place, we can honor God and raise children who will honor God. The world may be X-rated, but our kids can be rated G.

Since this is a tough series, I wanted to make sure that we all know where we are heading.. We need to begin with the end in mind. I will lift up a picture of what a good kid looks like. That's our

goal. How do we help develop a child in a way so they will be not only a good kid, but a good adult, and a good person. That is the end that we are looking for. What are the qualities and characteristics that we want to see in that individual. What would enable them to not be swayed and overrun by the culture around them. There are five things:

First is **confidence**. That they would have a good self-image, that they'd feel good about themselves. Not cocky or arrogant, but with the assurance that they could accomplish what they need to accomplish. A confidence that leads to hopefulness. That sort of confidence.

Second is character, to be a person of **character**. That they would have a moral compass by which they make their decisions, being able to say that this is right and this is wrong. Character that involves integrity, that characteristic where we do what is right because it is right, even if it is not popular, or if it costs us personally. We want our kids to have a Christ-like character.

Third is a sense of **conviction**. These are our beliefs. Everybody has beliefs. Everybody lives by their faith. It's just that some people don't have any faith beyond themselves. And so their beliefs are based on how they feel at the time. We need to lead our children and youth to the point where their beliefs will be grounded in the Word, in the way, and in the will of God.

A fourth characteristic is **compassion**. We want kids to know that they are not the center of the universe, and that the situation of the people around them can be quite difficult. We want them to care about those who are hurting. When we get kids in missions and work camps, they suddenly get to see a whole new and different side of life, and that view can often change their world and themselves.

And the final characteristic is **competence**, that they would know their talents, gifts, and skills, so they could see themselves as difference makers in the world. That is the picture of what I want kids to look like. That is my prayer. Are my children there yet? No. Am I there? Sometimes, but not always. I still have work to do. It is all part of the Christian journey to move toward perfection. But I'm certainly not there yet. And so I will begin to teach 10 actions, all biblical principles found in 1 Timothy, that will help us move our children, our youth, and ourselves toward that goal of developing the qualities and characteristics that we want to see in a person. And it starts with ...

## **1. KIDS NEED BELIEF.**

Over the years I have met bunches of parents who have worried about the evils of anything from MTV to Sponge Bob Square Pants. They don't want the wrong influence affecting their children. But the greatest influence on the life of our children is not what they watch on the tube, but who they watch in the home. Parents have the greatest influence on their kids. In fact, your actions, values, and beliefs will be the greatest influence in the life of your child. It might be hard to believe, but kids say that they want their mom and dad to be their hero. They want that parental influence. Why? Because that's how God created the family system to work.

Psalm 127 says "*Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from Him. How happy is the man [or woman] whose quiver is full of them.*" Children are a gift from God. What do we do with the gifts God has given us? We develop those gifts. So a child is an important, God-given responsibility. Jesus told us how important a child is. In Mark 9 we read, "*He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in His arms He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me; and he doesn't just welcome Me but the One who sent Me.'*"

Jesus said that when we welcome a child into our midst, it is the same as welcoming God into our midst. That's pretty important. And it shows how seriously we are to take the job parenting.

Now I understand that many of us work outside the home out of obligation or necessity; that we go forth to follow what we are called and created to do in life. But is our work in the marketplace a higher calling, a higher value than parenting. Andy Stanley wrote a book called Choosing to Cheat. In it he argues that we have more to do than we have the time and energy to do. And so we choose the areas of life that we are going to cheat. Often we choose to cheat our home life, our family, our spouse, our children. We believe that because they love us, they will understand and forgive us. But we have to ask ourselves, what is the higher value? What is the more important calling? As a society we do not take the responsibility of parenting very seriously.

What if the next time someone asks you what you do for a living, say, "I'm in charge of socializing homo sapiens in the dominant values of the Judao-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments in the transformation of the social order into the teleological described utopian inherent in the echelon that God prescribed. And what do you do? Just a lawyer?"

Kids need belief. They need to know that they are important, that you know, respect, and honor the important responsibility of parenting. For if we don't believe in the value of our role as a parent, we won't value our role as a parent. And the consequences of our unbelief will sabotage our kids and ruin them. We need to believe that parenting is important. Kids need to see that belief in action.

## **2. KIDS NEED PRESENCE**

When I talk about presence, hear the word TIME. A while back a great debate took place over quantity time vs. quality time. The idea was developed by the baby boomers trying to ease their guilt over not spending enough time or giving enough presence, to their kids. But the reality is that there can be no quality time without the necessary quantity of time. Now I understand that kids are often like an F5 tornado. They suck up everything in their path - food, money, energy, time - and often leave destruction in their wake. We sometimes wonder if all that time and energy is really paying off. Is it worth it? But without our presence, our kids can never develop those 5 C's that we want them to develop.

Now I will confess that I have often been selfish in my life. Time is precious and I want to spend time on me, on what I want to do. This idea of presence with my kids is a huge challenge to my priorities. For single parents, I don't know how you can pull that off. It is amazing. And I believe God will credit your hard work and your kids will see that and call you blessed. But what kids won't appreciate are those of us who are overworking not to survive but to drive nicer cars, to live in bigger houses, to buy the best toys and to stroke our own egos. Then when somebody complains that we're not around, we blame it on them. "If you didn't take so much money, if you weren't involved in so many things... I wouldn't have to work so much." Children and youth like their toys. There is no doubt about that. But in the long run they would rather have your presence than your money or your career. Presence matters.

Presence needs to be important to us because it was and is important to God. From the beginning, God wanted us to be with Him. He came to the garden to walk with Adam and Eve. But over the centuries, we have walked away. We walked away to our own destruction. Still God cared about us enough to come to be with us. John 1:14: "*So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.*" God left the glories of heaven just to be present with us. And God continues to be present with us. In 2 Timothy we are told that we live: "*With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.*"

Presence is a big deal to God. Presence is important to our kids. And presence needs to be important to us.

Sometimes it is more than just being there, because there are times when the body is present, but the heart and mind are not. And that's important because a study out of Harvard found that the largest contributing factor to rage, anger, and hostility is the perceived inaccessibility of one or both parents. They might have been there but the children didn't really think they were there. So how do we deal with that? How do we rectify that?

First, consider your personal sacrifices. What are you currently doing that is taking time away from your kids? What might you need to sacrifice so that your children aren't sacrificed? It is important to be there at soccer matches and ball games. It is important to be there for dance recitals and concerts. It is important to get them there for practices, and to be there when they perform. It doesn't matter if you like what they are doing or not, because it is not about you. It is about supporting them. Sometimes even some work time, some meetings can be sacrificed to pay attention to a higher priority - your family. If you don't, you will suddenly turn around and discover that your kids are grown and gone, and you never saw it happening.

Consider your personal sacrifices and then make sure that you focus on your kids. That might mean that when you're in the car, turn off the phone and the radio. It is one place where we are guaranteed that our kids aren't going anywhere. Use that time to talk and laugh together. Enjoy those moments. Focus on them and give them feed back. Practice reflective listening where you restate what they have said to you. Let them know that you are there, that you are engaged and involved. Because your kids need your presence. They need your interest even if they act like they don't want it. They need it. It's essential for their development. Presence matters. Why do kids like to go to their grandparents? Because the grandparents are focused on them. They give them special attention. That's why kids love being at grandma and grandpa's. Parents, grandparents, our young people need our presence.

What do kids need? We are just getting started. But when you look at those young ones, keep the end in mind. Remember the 5 C's of Confidence, Character, Conviction, Compassion, and Competence. Remember to believe in the importance of parenting. And make time to spend time with them. Give them your presence, even if you have to make some sacrifices to do it. Next week we will continue to look at what our kids need so they can develop into the adults that God created them to be. And in your life, may it all come together; may it be so. Amen.