

The Great Commission Starts in Your Backyard

For parents, our most important mission field is closer than we think.

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According to a recent [Barna report](#) on spiritual conversations in a digital age, children who grow up regularly talking about faith and seeing their parents integrate faith into everyday life are much more likely to continue being actively engaged in their faith as they grow older. In other words, parents who are eager to talk with their kids about spiritual matters raise kids who are likewise eager. While we often think of sharing faith as something we do with strangers or non-Christian friends, some of the most significant and impactful conversations happen in the familiar context of home.

Those of us who are parents know this is easier said than done.

I'm the mother of four children between the ages of 4 and 12. This last spring after school and sports ended, every room in my house needed major work—organizing, vacuuming, and cleaning. The clothes in my laundry room seemed to be crawling to the washing machine on their own.

One morning, I heard my youngest daughter call out, “Mom, there’s a big glob of SunButter on the kitchen floor!” *We didn’t eat any SunButter today or yesterday*, I thought. I headed straight for the kitchen. While wiping up the mess, I noticed how much the floor needed mopping. One thing led to another and before I knew it, I organized, vacuumed, cleaned, and organized more until the day was almost over. Although my cleaning efforts were understandable, I failed to spend time—even a little time—discipling those to whom Christ has called me: my kids.

In one sense, it seems odd to think of our children as a strategic ministry objective from God; they’re not strangers living in a different culture in a different part of the world. But parents are statistically the most lasting influence on faith, which means our children need to hear the Good News from us on a regular basis. Each day, parents function as ministers—missionaries, even—to a native people we alone have intimate knowledge of and access to.

As a mother, I often struggle to sense the eternal importance of my mission. When did a joyful opportunity to minister become burdensome? How does a God-inspired passion for others become an obligation? The harvest may be plentiful, but the parents are routinely tired and discouraged (Matt. 9:37).

Just last week, I sat down with a large, hot cup of coffee in one hand, some books in the other, and two restless kids by my side, hoping to read stories and a children’s devotion. Halfway through the first story, my six-year-old interrupted to inform me she would no longer eat candy in the shape of a Lego brick. Before I could respond, the train was off the track as the two children digressed into their own private conversation about candy-eating habits.

Even when I do find uninterrupted time to disciple my children, I often think of it as just another repetitious task like loading the dishwasher. But teaching children the Good News is one of the most effective ways to follow Jesus’ instructions to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt.

28:19). I have a mission field alive and growing right under my own roof, and making time for spiritual formation is part of my call to raise eternal beings for eternal purposes.

We find this call in Scripture. Paul's letter to the Romans instructs believers to claim what they know to be true about the gospel: namely, that the Good News of redemption is for everyone. He underscores his confidence in the believers in Rome who were "filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14). Similarly, parents, too, are competent to teach the gospel. It isn't just another task—it is perhaps the *one* task that defines us as parents who follow Jesus, and the eternal importance of it brings great joy.

Just as God gave Paul "the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel" to the Gentiles, God gives mothers and fathers the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel to children (Rom. 15:16) so they might become an offering acceptable to him. Although we often feel discouraged and thwarted, nonetheless we press on, knowing that what matters most is not how *successfully* we tell our children the Good News on any given day but rather how consistently we do it over time. When we pray with our children before bed, read Bible stories, and sing worship songs together, we invite God into the lives of our children, trusting that he is faithful to redeem and sanctify them by the Holy Spirit.

As we think about the Western church in an age of rising secularism, we often cast our gaze outward, as we should, toward those "out there" who are leaving the faith and departing the Body. But we also need to cast our gaze inward toward our own homes, understanding that discipleship and evangelism begin right here, in mundane routines and familiar spaces. The future of the church depends upon it.

For parents, the beauty and vitality of sharing the Good News with our children is in "preach[ing] the gospel where Christ was not known, so that [we] would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand'" (Rom. 15:20–21).

That preaching happens right in our own backyards.

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