

7 REASONS FOR THE FAMILY-INTEGRATED CHURCH

By Andy Manning

Father's Day 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

1. I always wanted to be a dad. When I was in preschool, the other kids and I would play “House” together, and I always wanted to be the dad. My best friend always wanted to be the dog. I always dreamed of being a dad. A big reason for that is because I grew up the youngest of five boys, and I had a wonderful father, and I wanted to be like him.
2. When I was in high school, I heard a sermon in church about the blessing of having a large family – as many children as God could give you. That the idea of purposefully forfeiting the privilege of parenthood, or of intentionally limiting yourself to only one or two children was foreign to the pages of Scripture. The preacher talked about **Psalm 127:3-5 (NLT)** “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior’s hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.” The Bible says children are a blessing, not a burden. They don’t decrease your joy and fulfillment, they multiply it. And the more children you can have, the better. The preacher talked about the many famous people throughout history who came from big families, and how if their parents decided to not have kids, or only have one or two kids, they would never have been born, and the world would never have known them. I have since compiled my own list. Just to mention a few:
 - i. Joseph was the eleventh of twelve sons.
 - ii. King David was the youngest of 8 sons.
 - iii. Thomas Aquinas was the youngest of 8 children.
 - iv. George Washington was the 5th of ten children.
 - v. Ben Franklin was the 15th of 17 children.
 - vi. John Wesley was the 15th of 19 children.
 - vii. Charles Wesley, the greatest hymn writer of all time, was the 18th of 19 children.
 - viii. Jonathan Edwards was the 5th of eleven children, the only son.
 - ix. George Whitfield was the 7th child born to his parents.
 - x. Mozart was the youngest of 7.
 - xi. Charles Finney was the youngest of 9 children.
 - xii. DL Moody was the 7th of 9 children.
 - xiii. Thomas Edison was the 7th and last child of his family.
3. The same preacher also talked about how being a parent and raising your kids to follow Christ is your primary calling in life, and the most important thing you can do with your life.

4. From these experiences God gave me a vision for my life – to get married, have as many children as we could have, and raise these children to be warriors for Jesus Christ.
5. But there was a problem with this vision. As I said, I was raised in a very godly home. My parents were pillars of their Baptist church. We were at church every time the doors were open. My parents had a wonderful marriage, they loved us dearly, and they set a godly example for us. But when we became adults, I was the only one of my parent’s five sons to still be active in church. As I thought about this over the years, I decided that there were many things about my parents and my upbringing that I wanted to imitate, but there were a couple of things that I wanted to do differently.
6. First, I wanted to home school my kids. My parents were wonderful people, but because of school we were away from them for seven to eight ours of the day. Growing up, a couple of home school families joined our church, and I saw that the kids were very different. They were much more mature. Much more spiritual. Much less worldly. So I decided that I wanted to home school my children so that my wife and I, rather than their peers and teachers, could be the biggest influence in their lives.
7. Second, my brothers and I were very active in church. We were in Sunday school, Training Union, church choir, youth group, Royal Ambassadors, youth camp, etc. Yet, as I said, four out of five of us left the church after high school. And I discovered that our family was pretty typical. About 70 percent of kids drop out of church after high school. For all the wonderful things about the churches that we belonged to, they failed miserably to reach the next generation. So, I knew that something wasn’t right about this. Eventually I discovered a different church model, called the family-integrated church. In the family-integrated church, families are kept together in church, and parents are expected and equipped to disciple their children at home. This model made a lot of sense to me. I could see the potential. As good as my upbringing was, when I was growing up the church didn’t really teach parents to disciple their kids at home. The main emphasis was only bringing your kids to church and dropping them off. And I could see how parents could make a much bigger impact on their kids if they were enabled to do church with their kids.
8. So, at Church Acadiana, we are a family-integrated church. Not because we believe this is the way to grow the biggest church, but because this is the kind of church that I want to be a part of. This is the kind of church that I want my kids to be a part of. And I believe the family-integrated church is the best model for reaching the next generation. Over the years I have been tempted to go back to the old way of doing church so that we can attract more people, because most people expect a church to have age-segregated ministries for their kids. But each time I have these thoughts I remember, I don’t want my own kids in Sunday school, or in youth group. I want them in church with me and my wife.

9. So, today I want to cast the vision of the family-integrated church. I want to show you why I believe that the family-integrated church is the best way to do church.
10. First, what is the family-integrated church? In the family-integrated church, families do church together rather than going their separate ways. We don't have special classes or groups for kids, because they are incorporated in all that we do. At the same time, parents are expected to take seriously the command to go home during the week and bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).
11. Now let's look at seven reasons for the family-integrated church.

II. 7 Reasons for the Family-Integrated Church

1. The traditional model is dysfunctional.

- i. As I said, most teens drop out of church after high school. Up to 70 percent.
- ii. My family is an example. I was raised in a godly home, the youngest of five sons. Were in church every time the doors were open. I can't think of one thing that my parents did wrong. They did everything the preacher told them to do to raise godly children. Today, I'm the only one active in church. The traditional church model failed us miserably.
- iii. If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you always got.
- iv. The definition of insanity is to continue doing the same thing and expecting a different result.
- v. It is only natural for children to follow in the footsteps of their parents. So, why aren't they following us in the faith? When you take kids away from their parents, their influence decreases.
- vi. **Matthew 28:19-20** "19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- vii. God has commanded us to reach the world for Christ, but we're not even reaching our kids.
- viii. Reaching the next generation must be the church's top priority. To do that it is time to try something different.

2. The traditional model divides the church.

- i. One reason kids are dropping out of church is very simple to understand. In the traditional church, high schoolers are a part of the youth group. And the youth group is like a church within a church. It is very much separated from the rest of the church. When students graduate high school, they must leave the youth group, and they lack a strong bond with the rest of the church. They don't feel like they fit in. So, it becomes very easy to drop out.
- ii. **Mark 3:25** "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."
- iii. In the family-integrated church, the generations are mixed together. Kids form strong bonds not only with other kids, but with adults in the church.

So, when they graduate from high school, nothing about their church experience changes.

3. The traditional model disconnects children from mature adults.

- i. Who came up with the idea that if you put a child in a room full of immature children then he will come out mature?
- ii. Doesn't bad company corrupt good character?
- iii. **1 Corinthians 15:33** "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
- iv. As parents, we know how important it is to protect our kids from bad influences. Did you ever consider that they could also be negatively influenced at church? Sadly, kids often pick up bad habits from their peers at church.
- v. At the same time, I have seen unruly kids become perfect angels when they sit next to their parents.
- vi. **Proverbs 27:17** "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."
- vii. The family-integrated church places kids with the adults. Immaturity isn't cool. Goofing off isn't tolerated. Misbehaving will get you in trouble.
- viii. Being around a group of mature Christian adults teaches and encourages them to grow in maturity.

4. The traditional model delays spiritual growth.

- i. The traditional model delays spiritual growth in kids because it teaches them that they are the church of tomorrow rather than the church of today.
- ii. The traditional model underestimates children – what they can learn, how well they can behave, how much they can contribute. We think we have to dumb it way down, and make it really fun, or else they will hate church.
- iii. So, kids are taught that they need to wait to serve God; wait to get serious about the faith; wait to take responsibility for the church; wait to start tithing; wait to make a difference; wait to be leaders.
- iv. But in the family-integrated church, we teach kids that they are the church today. They can serve today. They can pray today. They can contribute today. They can give today. They can participate in big church with us today. They may be young, but they are expected to get serious about their faith today.
- v. The traditional church model also delays spiritual growth in parents. Since they don't have to teach the Bible to their kids, they don't have to learn it.
- vi. You learn the most when you have to teach something to others. When you tell parents that it is their job to teach their kids the Bible, they will learn and grow a lot deeper, a lot faster because they are forced to read and study and learn and understand so they can pass it on.

5. The traditional model discourages home discipleship.

- i. The Bible teaches that parents are responsible to disciple their kids. Let's look at some Scripture.
- ii. **Genesis 18:19** "For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what he promised him."
- iii. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** 4 "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one., 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead., 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.
- iv. **Proverbs 3:1** "My son, don't forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commands; for they will bring you many days, a full life, and well-being."
- v. **Ephesians 6:4** "Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."
- vi. Delegation is a wonderful thing. You can have someone else fix your car, and repair your roof, and do your taxes, but there are some things that you cannot delegate, and that includes meeting your spouse's emotional needs, and disciplining your children.
- vii. If you do something for someone, they won't do it for themselves. If you always tie your child's shoes, will they ever learn to tie it themselves? In fact, you are communicating that it's your job and not your child's to tie their shoes.
- viii. Because the traditional model teaches kids for parents, parents are less inclined to do it themselves.
- ix. When there is a lifeguard on duty, then you won't watch your kids as closely.
- x. If parents see that someone else is disciplining their children, then they will stop doing it themselves.
- xi. A survey by the Barna Research Group supports that claim. According to this report, Eighty-five percent of parents with children under age 13 believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. However, a majority of parents don't spend any time during a typical week discussing religious matters or studying religious materials with their children. . . . Parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive. (Whitney, Donald S. *Family Worship* (pp. 13-14). Crossway.)
- xii. But in the family-integrated church, not only are parents encouraged to teach their kids at home, but the church refuses to do it for them. It forces the parents to be responsible and step up to the plate.

6. The traditional model disadvantages parents.

- i. The traditional church model prevents parents from two essential aspects of discipleship. Parents are unable to set the example at church, or watch over their kids at church.
- ii. In the traditional model, you don't get to show your child how to behave in church. You don't get to show them how to pray, how to worship, how to interact with others, how to pray, how to participate in Bible study, because they are away from you.
- iii. In the traditional church, you don't get to observe your kids and give them feedback. You don't know exactly what your kids are being taught, how well they are listening, how well they are behaving, how well they are participating, how well they are interacting with others.
- iv. Years ago Robert Coleman wrote a famous book called *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, in which he detailed Christ's approach to discipling the apostles.
 1. Selection: Men were his method.
 2. Association: He stayed with them.
 3. Consecration: He required obedience.
 4. Impartation: He gave himself away.
 5. Demonstration: He showed them how to live.
 6. Delegation: He assigned them work.
 7. Supervision: He kept check on them.
- v. The family-integrated church follows this plan for reaching the next generation.
 1. Selection: Your kids are your disciples.
 2. Association: You stay with your kids in church.
 3. Consecration: You make your kids behave in church.
 4. Impartation: You teach your kids at home.
 5. Demonstration: You set the example for your kids at church.
 6. Delegation: You let your kids serve alongside you at church.
 7. Supervision: You watch over your kids at church.

7. The traditional model devalues parents.

- i. The traditional model assumes that parents are non-essential. The main job of parents is delivery; transportation; parents are just carriers.
- ii. But the family-integrated church believes that parents are the key to reaching the next generation.
 1. Who knows your children better than you?
 2. Who loves your children more than you?
 3. Who do your children love and know and respect more than you?
 4. Who knows how to best communicate to your children?
- iii. Parents are commanded to disciple their children, not to delegate the discipleship of their children. There are many things you can delegate in life:

You can get someone else to care for your lawn, to fix your car, to work on your plumbing, etc. But there are some things that you can't delegate. You can't delegate your daily quiet time. You can't delegate having dinner with your family. You can't delegate meeting your spouse's emotional needs. And you can't delegate the discipleship of your children. The church can help you, but the church cannot be you.

- iv. Don't underestimate the difficulty of reaching your kids for Christ. Just because you love Jesus and bring your kids to church, that doesn't mean your kids will follow Christ. You must do everything you can, and that means discipling them at home. I'm reminded of the story of Hezekiah and his son Manasseh (2 Kings 18-21). Hezekiah was the greatest and most godly king in Judah's history. He led the nation out of idolatry. He defeated the Philistines and the mighty Assyrians. God did amazing miracles through his prayers, such as healing him from a terminal illness and promising him fifteen more years to live. Yes as great as Hezekiah was, he was not able to pass the torch of piety to his son Manasseh. Manasseh became king after Hezekiah, reigned 55 years, and was the worst king in Judah's history. He led the nation back into idolatry, and even practiced child sacrifice -- murdering Hezekiah's grandson. There are many lessons to learn from this story, but the thing that jumps out at me is that raising godly kids is not easy. You must get serious about leading them to God, because the devil is serious about stealing them from God. You only have your children at home for eighteen years. You have to get serious about discipling them.
- v. **Donald S. Whitney** (*Family Worship*) "A high percentage of churchgoing teenagers leave the church once they finish high school. One of the leading problems with this issue is that... most of these young people have no early, sweet memories of family worship. Such recollections, if they had them, might help prevent their departure from the faith in the first place. Or if they do walk away, the memories might be the means to turn their hearts to seek God again later."
- vi. **Donald S. Whitney** "Having your family in a Christ-exalting, gospel-centered, Bible-teaching local church is crucial to Christian parenting. But it is not enough for conveying to your family all you want to teach them about God and your beliefs. Moreover, it is unlikely that exposure to the church once or twice a week will impress your children enough with the greatness and glory of God that they will want to pursue him once they leave your home."

III. FIVE STEPS TO HOME DISCIPLESHIP

1. See the goal.
2. Specify the instructor. Preferably the dad, but mom is okay if dad cannot do it.
3. Set aside the time and stick to it. It needs to be several times a week. For me, it is Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, right after dinner.

4. Select the curriculum.
 - i. When children are young, start with Bible stories. I like the books by Kenneth Taylor.
 - ii. There's another great book called *Leading Little Ones to God*, by Marian Schoolland.
 - iii. As they get older, read the Bible to them.
 - iv. Occasionally you may want to read a Christian book to them.
 - v. Part of your curriculum should be Catechism. You can find my book, *Home Discipleship Catechism*, on my blog.
 - vi. I have also written a book to be used in family devotions called *Raising Kids of Christlike Character*. It helps you to teach your kids to essential Christian virtues such as love, and joy, and generosity, and courage.
5. Set up a simple system.
 - i. Catechism.
 - ii. Sing.
 - iii. Lesson.
 - iv. Pray.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Let me show one of the saddest passages of Scripture.
2. **Judges 2:7-10** “7 The people worshiped the Lord throughout Joshua’s lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the Lord’s great works he had done for Israel. 8 Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110. 9 They buried him in the territory of his inheritance, in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. 10 That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel.”
3. How is it possible that Joshua’s generation knew and worshiped the Lord, and they had seen God do so many miracles, such as the battle of Jericho and the parting of the water of the Jordan River, but the generation after them did not know the Lord or the works he had done? They forgot their priority. They forgot their primary mission. Their focus was on entering the promised land, defeating their enemies, and building new cities. But they forgot the most important thing – passing on the faith to the next generation. Let’s not make the same mistake.
4. Your greatest achievement in life is not what you build, or what you fix, or what you invent, or what you solve, but who you raise. Raise your kids for Jesus.