

Baby Steps toward Divergence... Chris Graves

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I work with kids and am trying to lead my ministry towards divergence. We're taking baby steps. I mean that in two ways-yes, I work with babies and children, but I also mean that we are moving painfully slowly towards the road less traveled. But there is forward progress! Here are three things I've learned along the bumpy road.

1. It is easier to partner with parents in our children's ministry than our teen ministry. Parents drive their kids to church. Parents must (at our church) sign their kids into the classes. Parents ask what their kids are learning. Parents their teachers ask if their kid behaved in class. Those facts help us bridge begin conversations with parents. Teens' parents are often tougher to get to know and rarely ask about how their child is doing.

2. In my experience, parents of children are more comfortable with discipling their kids than parents of teens. The parent of an eight year old is used to going over spelling words and math problems and such—they often teach their kids on a daily basis. So we give them ideas and tools and they are, for the most part, more open to that idea than parents of teens. I often hear a mom say that she doesn't know the Bible well enough to teach her 14 year old daughter, but I rarely hear that from a mom of a 7 year old.

3. Parents of young children need specific, practical ideas. We have preached on the topic. We have put devotionals in the church library. We have passed out a booklet full of practical ways to disciple at home. We have given them specific tools for Easter and Christmas. We suggest books to buy for birthday or Christmas presents. We do whatever we can to give them practical ideas. Parents most often agree on the "why" they need to disciple their children, but are often lost on the "how." That is my job and the families are more willing when they get real-life ideas that real people can do.

We are miles from the goal. Our participation rate (as far as we can tell) has a long way to go, but we are determined to get there. It is hard to change mindsets and a leave-it-to-the-professionals culture. But we believe it is wise to pour extra effort into the families with young children, so we can reap those benefits in the teen years.

Water, Wine and the Hope of Parents... Chris Graves

2008-04-28 16:04:02 by Steve Wright



One of my favorite lines is from JC Ryle's essay called "Duties of Parents." Ryle hasn't been around for a hundred years, but has a ton of wisdom for us today. He wrote:

I know that you cannot convert your child. I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I know also that God says expressly, "Train up a child in the way he should go," and that He never laid a command on man which He would not give man grace to perform. And I know, too, that our duty is not to stand still and dispute, but to go forward and obey. It is just in the going forward that God will meet us.

The path of obedience is the way in which He gives the blessing. We have only to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Cana, to fill the water-pots with water, and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine. (Taken from: <http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/ryle/parents/index.htm>).

I love that picture. We do our part by pouring everything we've got into our children and then the miracle of salvation is out of our hands. That is up to the Lord. We cannot force our children into the Kingdom. We cannot get their ticket for them. Our children's salvation (the hope of every Christian parent) is ultimately out of our hands.

Wouldn't it be nice to have control over our children's future? If there was something I could do to make sure my boys loved Jesus with all their being, I'd do it. If it costs a million, I'd raise it. If it required my life, I'd give it. But it doesn't work that way. I can only do my part—be faithful, love them and lead them—and leave the outcome to God.

I have to ask why. Why is the greatest hope of Christian parenting (the salvation of our children) something that is out of our hands? I believe it forces us to be dependent on the Father. That's right where He wants us. He loves us to recognize our need for Him and often leads us down roads that show us that we need Him more than we need anything in the universe. Then we fall on our faces and ask Him to work. We admit our need. He gets the glory.

However, Ryle is right. God still commands us to pour into our kids. He tells us to train up a child in the way they should go (Prov 22:6) and tells us to impress His truths on their hearts (Deut 6:7). He commands us to train and instruct and teach and discipline and give it all we've got. Then after we have done all we can, He does what only he can do.

What is incredible is how the Lord honors my shoddy work. Every parent, if he or she was honest, would admit that we haven't poured in everything we should. I've lost my temper. I've missed opportunities I can never get back. But I find comfort in realizing that He works when I don't. He is the Father that my boys need and that I wish I could be. He is in charge and I can place my boys in His wonderful hands and let Him work. I'll do what I can, but only He can change water into wine.
