

life groups' sermon guide **"how? family ministry"**



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to the unchurched.

"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." – Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:14)

It has become increasingly challenging to live out one's Christian faith in today's world. Nowhere are these challenges faced more regularly than by those parents attempting to train their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6).

As Pastor Matt pointed out last week, the prospects are dim of our children staying grounded in their Christian faith as they grow older. In fact, a recent report by the Center for Biblical Engagement confirmed, "An estimated 8 out of 10 youth from evangelical Christian homes walk away from their faith by age 23."¹

Some time ago, a pastor found himself faced with the opportunity to disciple young men who were wrestling with skeptical objections toward Christianity. After sharing some of his experiences with the congregation in his preaching and teaching illustrations, a member of the church pulled him aside to express concerns about the time being spent with these skeptics. The rationale was that people inside the church needed his attention, over and above those outside the church.

Q:: What would you do in that situation?

Q:: Why is there a trend among young people to walk away from the Church and their faith as they get older?

Q:: If they ever come back to the Church, what is the motivation that often brings them back?

Discussion:

Hillary Clinton famously once said that it takes a village to raise a child. And more recently former Senator Rick Santorum wrote that it takes a family to raise a child. They are both right, and within the Christian community, we can see this truth at work.

¹ For more information, see Arnold Cole and Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, "Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4," Center for Biblical Engagement, December 2009, p. 2. Accessed online 29 October 2010:
http://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/images/stories/pdf/Scientific_Evidence_for_the_Power_of_4.pdf

Ensuring that our kids are thoroughly prepared to meet the challenges they'll face in life is the goal of every involved parent. But as we parents know, raising children is a collaborative effort—shared by teachers, coaches, youth pastors and the many other adults who serve as surrogate “parents” in our children’s lives.

This collaborative effort is seen in the example of Nehemiah as he was leading the Israelite people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This task was fraught with difficulty. Not only is it difficult to build any massive structure from the ground up, but especially when there are forces constantly at work opposing the effort. In fact, there are interesting parallels between Nehemiah’s situation and our own situation of building up our children into men and women of God.

Q:: What was Nehemiah’s mission? Why was it important?

Q:: Read Nehemiah 4:1-23. What forces were opposing Nehemiah’s work? What obstacles did he and the Israelites need to overcome?

Q:: Where might we see parallels between what Nehemiah was attempting to do, and what any concerned parent is attempting to do?

Pray *and* Plan:

The book of Nehemiah has often been used as a helpful resource for understanding effective leadership. Given that leadership involved intentional influence, there are lessons that parents and Christians can learn from his example. For, we are all in a position to influence those around us, especially the next generation.

Note Nehemiah’s strategy for dealing with the obstacles he faced in rebuilding Jerusalem. He was intentional and strategic, balancing both spiritual priorities with practical considerations. For example, in Nehemiah 4:9, we see the Israelites praying to God for help *and* posting a 24 hour/day guard to meet the threats.

Q:: Do you agree with Nehemiah’s strategy?

Q:: What can we learn from his approach toward problem-solving?

Q:: Where might we see a similar need for balanced priorities?

Application:

Not only did Nehemiah balance spiritual priorities with practical realities, but he also understood basic human nature and used it to his advantage (and the advantage of all of the Israelites). His strategy for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was applied with this critical understanding in mind. And we also can learn from his approach.

Q:: Read Nehemiah 4:14. What was Nehemiah’s challenge to the people?

Q:: What was the significance of this challenge? That is to say, what basic human truth was he tapping into with this strategy?

Q:: When Nehemiah challenges the people to “fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes”, he was dealing with a very real physical threat. What threats are we facing today?

Q:: What are some practical ways we can work together to protect and promote the spiritual welfare of the family?

The challenge, as we’ve said from the beginning, is to build a firm foundation of faith for our children. And, working together, we can accomplish infinitely more than any of us could do alone. So, the question that each of us must ask ourselves is, “What part of the wall does God want me to build?” And we’re not alone in this effort. As Jesus warned his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).