

PERSPECTIVE

FEBRUARY 2019

PARTNERING *WITH* **PARENTS**



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Kyle Gross



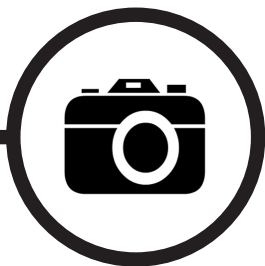
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Partnering with Parents

What does it mean to partner with parents in Family Ministry? Depending on who you ask, there could be a few different answers. At Mount Vernon, we believe that it is the parent's primary responsibility to train and disciple their children in the faith. At the same time, we also believe that the local church plays an important role in equipping parents for this ministry. This approach is often called the Family-Equipping model of Family Ministry.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

We believe the Family-Equipping model is the most faithful to Scripture, but such a model is nothing new or novel. In fact, we find this idea of partnering with parents throughout church history.

The early church fathers taught that Christian parents have a responsibility to train their children. The *Didache*, an early church document used to teach new believers, explains that parents, "shall not withhold your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God."¹ Clement exhorted the church in Rome to embrace their corporate responsibility to also teach the "young": "Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us esteem those who have the rule over us; let us honor the aged among us; let us train up the young in the fear of God."² The earliest Christians taught that parents have a unique responsibility to train their children and that the church also has a responsibility to partner with parents in this important task.

In the period between the ancient church and the dawning of the medieval church, there was a change in the view of the parent's and the church's role in training children in the faith. In fact, there aren't a lot of examples of parents diligently teaching their children in the faith because there was such heavy reliance on institutions to provide all the biblical teaching and training for children. Michael Wren Jr. offers his understanding of these changes:

With the dawning of the imperial favor in the fourth century AD and the crumbling of the Roman Empire in the fifth, the primary locus of Christian practice drifted from homes to dedicated institutional structures. Especially in the Middle Ages, generations grew less literate, and training in

Christian traditions increasingly became the domain of professional clergy.³

Two examples in this time period are exceptions: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Augustine, in the fourth century, came to faith as an adult; yet, he wrote that his mother's prayers and her confidence in God's sovereignty profoundly impacted his journey to faith. As a pastor in Hippo, he taught on marriage and emphasized the important role that parents play in training children to fear the Lord. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, like Augustine, believed training children is an important goal of parenting: "offspring signifies not only the begetting of children, but also their education, to which as its end is directed the entire communion of works that exists between man and wife as united in marriage."⁴

Though lost in the Middle Ages, the Reformers recaptured the importance of partnering with parents. Without a doubt, Martin Luther valued marriage and parenting and considered the raising of children to know the Lord as a noble and precious work:

The best thing in married life, for the sake of which everything ought to be suffered and done, is the fact that God gives children and commands us to bring them up to serve him. To do this is the noblest and most precious work on earth, because nothing may be done which pleases God more than saving souls.⁵

John Calvin, though deeply committed to seeing parents instruct and teach their own children, saw that the church also played an important role in training children. He believed the church ought to carefully "see that children should be duly instructed in the Christian religion."⁶ This emphasis marked the Puritans as well. For example, Richard Baxter not only encouraged the fathers in his church to lead their wives and children in family worship and in learning the catechism, but he also went to their houses to make sure that such instruction was actually taking place!

In this very brief sketch of the history of partnering with parents, we see that the role of the parents to train their children and the church's role to equip parents in this task is nothing new. With the dawning of the Industrial Revolution, a significant shift took place. The parent's role in training their children became diminished while the church's role as a "professional" institution was elevated. In many ways, this trend has carried on in the modern church. Thankfully, in recent years, there has been a lot of

great work done to show from Scripture and history that the parent's role is primary in training children in the fear of the Lord while the church's role is to equip parents to succeed in their God-given role.

LIVING IN THE MIDDLE

Because many churches today have lost sight of the scriptural call to partner with parents, they completely separate children from adults. These churches offer programming for children from birth all the way to college and have trained staff for every stage of development. At its best, this type of church is striving to meet the unique needs of every generation. At its worst, this model keeps parents out of the loop of their child's spiritual formation. It enables adults to drop off their children and youth at their respective ministries and then pick them up when they are ready to leave church.

Many churches and church leaders have seen the danger in a ministry model that keeps children totally separated from their parents and other adults. These men and women recognize the biblical mandate for the parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children.

There are churches on the other end of the spectrum, too. They don't have separate classes for kids. They completely integrate children and adults. This kind of integration in the church is often called the Family-Integrated model of Family Ministry. Many Christian brothers and sisters seek to integrate children and adults into every aspect of church life. The negative effect of Family-Integrated churches is that children are seen but rarely heard. The teaching of the church is only for adults, and though children may be present, there is never a time for them to be taught in a way that is appropriate to their stage of development. While it is great that this model heavily emphasizes the parent's role, it downplays the church's role in teaching children.

At Mount Vernon, we live in the middle. Unlike the Family-Integrated model, we do have age-segregated classes for children and youth. We think there is value in having these classes in order to teach children the Bible in a developmentally appropriate way. But we also intentionally have less programming so that children and youth are with their parents as well as other adults more often.

It may come as a shock to visiting families when they learn that we have no elementary-aged programming during the morning service. We want to help those

families, so we provide material to help families [parent in the pew](#) and even provide bulletins for children to help them engage in the service. We do this because we value children in the service and believe this will train them to see that God's people of every age gather as the church to worship God.

When it comes to Children's or Youth Ministry, we never want to eclipse the role of the parent to disciple their own children. What we do in classes on a Wednesday or Sunday is supplemental to what takes place each week in the homes of families. We will never have the amount of time a mom and dad have with their own children during the week. Recognizing this, we place more of our emphasis on training and equipping parents than on teaching children at church (though we labor to provide excellent teaching for children). We also labor to connect church and home by providing parents Take-Home cards for each class in Children's Ministry (you can find them in plastic holders by the door to the classroom). With these handouts, parents can know what their children are learning, their teacher's names and contact information, and additional resources to continue teaching their children at home.

ONE FAMILY PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

God in Christ has adopted us into his family, and now, we are considered the household of God (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15). Jesus told his disciples that they may lose biological family in following him, but they would gain a spiritual family in the church (Mark 10:29–30). God has called the church to be a family of spiritual mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, who are responsible to hold each parent accountable to raise their children in the admonition of the Lord. Whether you are a single person, a widow, or have a family of your own, every person in the church has a responsibility to partner with parents as they train their children. In a sense, these children are also your children because they belong to members of the church. You are not primarily responsible for these children like their parents are, but you also have a unique responsibility and opportunity to help show them the way of Christ.

As a church, we can lose sight of one of the greatest evangelistic opportunities we have every week: sharing the gospel with our children. I am reminded of what Luther said about teaching children to serve God—"to do this is the noblest and most precious work on earth, because nothing may be done which pleases God more than saving souls." Not only do parents partake in this

noble and precious work, but so can every member of the church. If we are one family, we recognize that the work of sharing the gospel to children isn't over when your own children believe the gospel. There is precious work to be done in sharing the gospel with all the children who are among us and with all the children who will be among us.

As members of Mount Vernon, we partner with parents to show the next generation the way of Christ. We do this through serving as volunteers or teachers in the Children's or Youth Ministries. However, we can partner with parents not just through teaching a children's class but by praying for parents to be faithful in their role to disciple their children. You can partner with parents by encouraging a mom when you see their child trying to take notes in the service. You can partner with parents as a single person by going over to a family's house and baby-sitting, so they can go on a date. We partner with parents because we are a family, not a family of families, but one big family of spiritual parents and siblings.

– Kyle Gross

¹ Didache 4.9, first or second century AD.

² 1 Clement 21.6.

³ Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, eds., *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, 101.

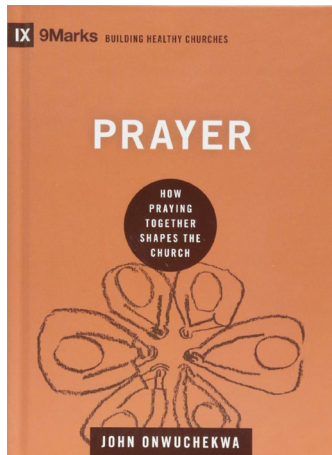
⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 6168-6169.

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism in The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 410.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 28.

Prayer

Written by John Onwuchekwa



Many people at Mount Vernon will recognize John Onwuchekwa's as a pastor in the Atlanta area and he has spoken at our church several times. Most people don't know the deeply personal experience that prompted his book on prayer. In *Prayer*, John discusses how the unexpected death of his brother took his spiritual breath away. The familiar metaphor of prayer as breathing suddenly became personal. He knew he couldn't live without communing with his Heavenly Father, moment by moment. But this book is not only about learning to personally pray better and

more. It's about how praying together shapes the whole life of a church. John wants church members to move from spectators to participants as they embrace the privilege of calling upon the name of the Lord as a church family. This book will enrich your personal prayer life, and it will unpack the biblical vision of prayer that unifies, equips, and changes the church. So how does prayer shape the life of the church? Here are three important ways that John explores.

Corporate prayer unifies us. As we learn to pray biblically, following the instruction that Jesus left for his followers in the Lord's Prayer, our priorities become aligned with those of our Heavenly Father. We learn to cherish God's character and presence before we seek his provision. What we choose to pray about proclaims what is most important to us. The church can grow in unity as its priorities are shaped by God's word and Jesus' example.

Corporate prayer prompts missional endeavors. When we pray together, God sovereignly works to overcome our anxiety and apathy about evangelism and missions. Prayer reminds us that we are fundamentally dependent on God and that we need him to change and equip us for what he has called us to do. When we pray for evangelistic opportunities as a church, we are reminding each other of God's sovereignty and our responsibility for the regular work of sharing the Gospel with unbelievers.

Prayer reminds us that we are family. When we become followers of Christ, our identity expands. We are interdependent parts of a body, commissioned to care for each other and carry each other's burdens. We often cannot change the circumstances our brothers and sisters are experiencing, but we can bring them before the throne of grace to ask for God's help and mercy. This is a key part of biblical care for the body.

Praying together as a church forges unity around biblical priorities, equips the saints with boldness and energy, and solidifies our identity as a family. We can joyfully learn to depend on the Lord together. This excellent book will encourage and challenge you to do just that.

— RECOMMENDED BY ANDREA LEE

Excerpts From the Book

1

"I've become convinced that prayer is among the most vital keys to a successful ministry. It's as necessary as breathing. It's not meant to replace work but enable it. If we want to see our churches thrive in faithfulness to God, then our churches must pray like their lives depended on it. We must learn how to breathe together."

— Breath Again, p.25

2

"Persisting in prayer is also how we wrestle our wills into submitting to his. Persistent prayer is our saying, 'I know I should want to want your will, but I don't. God, help me want what you want. Help me to run headfirst into obedience.' Surrendering our hearts to God is the pathway to strengthening our hands."

— Roots, p.72

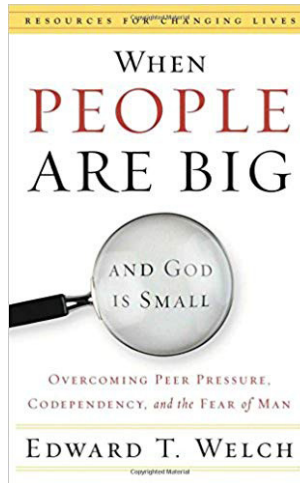
3

"You can't shout about God's forgiveness if you are stingy with your own. A community of people who confess their sins together is constantly reminded that they themselves are sinners who daily need God's forgiveness. Jealousy, strife, and competition are driven away as we confess our sins together."

— Glory, p.83

When People Are Big And God Is Small

Written by Edward T. Welch



In his book *When People Are Big And Gods Is Small*, Edward Welch pierces your heart from the beginning. Welch calls for his reader to face their “fear of man.” “Have you ever struggled with peer pressure” ... Are you over-committed? ... Do you “need” something from your spouse? ... Is self-esteem a critical concern for you?” (p. 15) We quickly realize that we all have been gripped with the desire to be accepted, loved, and respected by others or the fear of being found unworthy of those things. Welch challenges us to look deeply at our desires and confront the fear of man that so often overshadows our fear of the Lord.

We fear others because they can expose or humiliate us; they can reject, ridicule, or despise us; or they can hurt, attack, or threaten us. As Welch walks through these reasons we fear man, he helpfully includes a “For Further Thought” section at the end of each chapter to draw the reader to application. Welch does not pull any punches as he asks questions that leave the reader examining their own sinful fears.

Thankfully Welch provides steps to overcome the fear of man. Rightfully so, Welch points us to meditate on God himself. “If you have ever walked among giant redwoods, you will never be overwhelmed by the size of a dogwood tree. Or if you have ever been through a hurricane, a spring rain is nothing to fear. If you have been in the presence of the almighty God, everything that once controlled you suddenly has less power” (p.119). All who know God fall on a continuum of either living in terror (hiding from God) to living in worship of Him (seeking to draw near and submit to God) or somewhere in-between. The right fear of the Lord should push us to worship God for his holy justice and love.

One surprising takeaway was Welch’s challenge of the “love-cup” mentality. He explains in the chapter Biblically Examine Your Felt Needs: “If I stand before him (Jesus) as a cup waiting to be filled with psychological satisfaction, I will never feel quite full. Why? First, because my lusts are boundless; by their very nature, they can’t be filled. Second, because Jesus does not intend to satisfy my selfish desires. Instead he intends to *break* the cup of psychological needs (lusts), not fill it.” (p. 149)

I would recommend this book to anyone who feels that they struggle not only with the fear of man but a right view of God. Welch challenges the reader’s motives and perspective in a convicting and helpful way.

— RECOMMENDED BY LIZ FREEMON

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Too many Christians never see that self-love comes out of a culture that prizes the individual over the community and then reads that basic principle into the pages of Scripture. The Bible, however, rightly understood, asks the question, “Why are you so concerned about yourself?””
— *The World Wants Me To Fear People*, p.81

2

“[W]e should be careful about saying “Jesus meets all our needs.” At first, this has a plausible biblical ring to it. Christ *is* a friend; God *is* a loving Father ; Christians *do* experience a sense of meaningfulness and confidence in knowing God’s love. It makes Christ the answer to our problems. Yet if our use of the term “needs” is ambiguous, and its range of meaning extends all the way to selfish desires, then there will be some situations where we should say that Jesus does not intend to meet our needs, but that he intends to change our needs”
— *The World Wants Me To Fear People*, p.89

3

“With such adversaries, growing in the fear of the Lord will not be a smooth process. Instead, it will be a path of warfare. We must hate the evil and ungodly assumptions of the world, we must hate our own sinful nature, and we must hate Satan. To accomplish these tasks demands the most powerful resources we have: the Word, the Spirit, and the body of Christ.”
— *Know the Fear of the Lord*, p.101

FEBRUARY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

February 1	1 Peter 1:13–25	February 15	Hebrews 11:32–12:2
February 2	Psalms 51	February 16	Zephaniah 3:9–13
February 3	Psalms 51	February 17	Zephaniah 3:9–13
February 4	Zephaniah 3:1–8	February 18	John 6:1–21
February 5	Exodus 20:1–21	February 19	Matthew 14:13–33
February 6	Isaiah 5:1–7	February 20	Mark 6:30–52
February 7	Revelation 20:11–15	February 21	Acts 27:13–38
February 8	Matthew 6:5–14	February 22	Psalms 118
February 9	Zephaniah 3:1–8	February 23	John 6:16–21
February 10	Zephaniah 3:1–8	February 24	John 6:20
February 11	Zephaniah 3:9–13	February 25	Zephaniah 3:14–20
February 12	Deuteronomy 28:1–14	February 26	Genesis 2:1–25
February 13	Isaiah 62:1–12	February 27	Exodus 40:34–38
February 14	Isaiah 65:17–25	February 28	1 Kings 8:1–11

***Sermons in bold**

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Josh & Hannah
Black
Olivia (6),
John Isaac (3),
James (1)



Matt & Christie
Gerber



Ronnie & Patria
Herrera
Abdiel (3)



Samuel
& Rochelle
Soyoola



Melissa Vaughn



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH