

MAD Camp Sermon
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

The Scripture that Natalie just read so well is an ancient Scripture that tells us how important it is to pass on the things of God to our children.

We are to do this in many ways, all the time, integrating the message of the Lord into our daily lives – so our kids can hear it, see it and know it from the inside out...

For all of you parents/care givers/grandparents.... sending your kids here to MAD Camp for this week...to sing about God's goodness is a part of getting the truth about God's love for each one of them...deep down inside.

I don't know about you, but songs that I learned early on about the Lord...when I was in Sunday School...Vacation Bible School...Church Camp... still come back to me all the time...even at my ripe old age. I thank my parents for putting me in those contexts because what I learned as a child about the love of Jesus has never left me.

It has been the one constant in my life that I have relied on that has never let me down.

I find that the Holy Spirit often uses those childhood moments in church (for those of us who had them), and with people of faith who told me God loved me – at an early age...often he brings those words back to me at times when I need the very message that they are about.

I might have only understood the meaning of the words that I was learning partially as a child, but as an adult they pack a punch usually in a whole new way.

For instance, as an adult the song..“This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...” came to me when I was going through a very dark time in my life; and when those words came to me really out of the blue on day -(and I believe the Holy Spirit does that)- I knew that God's light was stronger than any darkness I was encountering at the moment.

And I started singing that song at the top of my lungs (in places where no one could hear me of course) and it helped so much get through the trial I was in.”

Or the song, “Jesus Loves Me This I Know”that's an old old song...but I learned it as a kid. And it came to my mind one day, and I realized that in that

moment...I really was not acting as if I was loved by the Lord that day – and I needed to spend some time refocusing on the fact that I was loved, and valued by God.

Even a song I learned the wrong way as a kid ministered to me recently. It is a song called “Lord I want to be a Christian, in my heart, in my heart. Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart.”

As a kid I sang in the children’s choir and the little boy next to me always would sing NOT Lord I want to be a Christian but “Lord I want to be a ‘question’....in my heart.”

So I thought that was the song. And those “wrong” words came back to me recently when I had some questions about why God was allowing some stuff happen...and I realized...God welcomes my questions...God wants me to ask them...honestly from the heart. He invites me to the table to explore my faith in deep and significant ways.

My questions are part of growing deeper in my relationship with God.

All this to say...these kinds of experiences for your kids...like MAD CAMP... where songs are learned about God’s goodness, drama on Biblical stories that have huge moral underpinnings on God’s faithfulness and justice...these will last a lifetime for your kids. God uses them and again and again to inform and transform...

What happened this week for your children...will not leave them.

Your children have participated in worshipping God through drama, music, song, art...in ways that will always be with them – all through their lives...they are going to remember these words, these songs, these messages...

And the Holy Spirit will encourage them, using what has been put into them this week...

Now...the question for all of us as parents, grandparents, caregivers is this. What are the next steps? How do we continue to water the seeds that have been planted here this week.

What do we do?

Another way to ask this questions is...How do we raise kids who are not just good academically (cause we live in an area where there is a lot of pressure and drive around that aspect of our kids lives– and that’s not a bad thing)...But there is a whole other part to life that sometimes gets neglected when the pressures of academic excellence drive us on...

Most parents want to give their kids every opportunity to succeed...and often we think this is all about academic success...I would say that academic success is only part of it.

There are other aspects like...

Raising our children to have a moral conscience; raising kids who are able to show empathy and compassion to others and also to recognize that their worth is not dependent on what they achieve...rather their worth is found in the Lord who loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives...and cares about them unconditionally.

Here at WVPC this is what we want your kids to know, because that reality sustains them through all of life and gives them strength when the going gets tough.

When they fail an exam, when they are rejected in friendship, when they realize they aren't perfect (nobody is) – they can know that God stills love them...and they have a church community that will embrace them...no matter what. Just like Jesus embraces us and loves us...no matter what...when we come to him.

The gift that you give to your kids by bringing them to places – like church - where God's love for them is known, and can be experienced in multiple ways, is one of those intangible things that people don't talk about too much anymore, but is vital in nurturing your child's spirit, and strengthening them in life for the long haul.

We recently had a parenting class where we asked the question, "If your kid got into Harvard, Yale, Princeton – but was not an ethical person; did not have good character – would you be satisfied as a parent?"

No one in the class said they would be satisfied.

We all want our kids to have good character, but we neglect the very things that form good character in them. One of those things that forms good character in children is regular church attendance and service to others. This has been shown in study after study.

In their review of the research "Religion and Health-Compromising Behavior," Wallace and Williams conclude: "There is a significant relationship between religiosity (attitudes, beliefs, affiliations, and behaviors) and involvement with sex and drugs. Young people who frequently attend religious services, who report that religion is important to them...on average are less likely to be involved with drugs and sex than are their less religiously engaged counterparts."

In a part of this study one Christian Mom was asked the following question:

"What values or heritage do you hope to pass on to your children that you don't expect them to get from school?"

She answered: **"Faith in God. The value of an interior life. Prayer. A God centered view of the world"**

The interviewer then asked her, **"How does your faith in God translate into what you teach your children about morality?"**

She said:

If you see God as the center of things, it affects everything. It affects why you behave in certain ways and not others. (Because there is a God) there is a standard of behavior. It comes partly from people who have tried to discern the mind of God over the ages... There is Someone who has created us to behave in a certain way, so much so that if we don't behave in that way, we are unhappy, we create problems for ourselves. We are called to goodness, to live our lives according to a very high standard.

What a great way to put it!

For this Mom, not only did they regularly attend church, but God was a normal part of their family conversation. God was a reference point for discussions about moral issues – all the time - ranging from why you are kind to your brother and sister to what God is calling us to do about the injustice in the world.

It reminds me of the scripture Natalie read. Talk about your faith in me all the time. Live it out on a daily basis!

And the church was the community that affirmed the values they were trying to instill in their kids at home—that God is alive and gives us the power to live with integrity, have compassion, and make a difference.

Why Religion Matters Even More is a summary article of current research on the effects that religious belief and practice have on family life. Dr. Patrick Fagan summarized it all and came up with the following bullet points:

Available data clearly indicate that religious belief and practice are associated with:

Stronger parent-child relationships;

Greater educational aspirations and attainment, especially among the poor;

Higher levels of good work habits;

Greater longevity and physical health;

Higher levels of well-being and happiness;

Higher recovery rates from addictions to alcohol or drugs (although those involved in religious belief and practice are less likely to use)

Higher levels of self-control, self-esteem, and coping skills;

Higher rates of charitable donations and volunteering;

Higher levels of community cohesion and social support for those in need.

I want to thank you for sending your children to us this week. Some of you have your own church that you attend. I want to encourage you to keep going. To keep bringing them. If you don't have a church home, get one...and of course we invite you here open arms.

Don't ever underestimate the value of what you are giving your kids when you bring them to church.

And friends...raising kids is not for cowards.

We cannot do it well all by ourselves. That's why we need the church We need each other.

Our kids need community, mentors, friends of all ages to assure them in countless ways, and at all the stages of development that God loves them, that they are invaluable to God – they are his beloved - and that they can make a difference in Jesus' name for a hurting world.

In two weeks time Steve will begin doing his music program for children on Wednesdays – a continuation of what was begun here this week. We have programs for Middle Schoolers, High Schoolers and elementary ages. We also have a service projects that we do monthly and quarterly. We have an after school program. We invite you.

My great grandparents were Italian immigrants and came to this country with no money. They lived in poverty, in the south side of Chicago – and especially my grandfather grew up in one of the roughest parts of town.

He learned to cope. He became a lightweight boxing champion. It probably saved his life. He used to tout that he had preached to Al Capone himself. Who knows?

But it was the Presbyterian Church in the neighborhood where he lived as a child that taught my great grandparents, and grandparents how to read English. It drilled into them the value of caring for others, of faith in Christ, and the importance of trusting God even when the brutalities of life on the South side of Chicago seemed too much to bear.

It changed my grandfather's life. Instead of becoming a gang member, he became a pastor.

Because he knew how to read, and had been tutored by those in the church my grandfather was able to get a college education – and an MDIV in a three year accelerated program at Duke – and his positive childhood memories were all about the church.

That was a long time ago, but I probably wouldn't be standing here as your pastor if it hadn't been for the impact that church had on my grandfather as a child.

Friends, our kids need the church – not because they are in dire physical poverty like he was– but our culture is one of spiritual poverty.

Today, despite our increased technological brilliance and ongoing entrepreneurial expertise the truth is...our kids still need a loving community in which to thrive, a deep connection to a God who cares for them – they are created for it...

A place where they are unconditionally accepted, listened to and challenged to make a compassionate difference. A place where they can discover that they were created by a God who loves them, who will never leave them or forsake them; a God who came in Jesus Christ to give his life for them.

Our kids need the church.

Keep bringing them! Don't ever underestimate the gift you give them when you do. Its eternal. Lets pray together.