

Some elementary students in New York were asked the following:

Why did God make mothers?

Because she's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is.

Why did God make mothers?

To clean mostly, I think.

Why did God make mothers?

To help us when we were getting born.

How did God make mothers?

He used dirt, just like the rest of us.

How did God make mothers?

Magic + superpowers and a lot of stirring.

How did God make mothers?

God made my mom just like he made me, he just used bigger parts.

What are mothers made of?

God makes mothers out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world, with just a dab of mean.

What are mothers made of?

They start off as bones, and then God mostly used string I think.

Why did God give you your mother and not some other one?

Because we're related

Why did God give you your mother and not some other one?

Because God knew she likes me a lot more than other people's moms do.

Mothers have played a starring role in the Biblical story of Christian formation from the moment Mary found the courage said yes to the Angelic proclamation that she was about to become a mom. As she bounced the saviour of the world on her knee, she did for him what a hundred generations of mothers had done before her: she taught her son what it meant to be a person of faith. She told him about Adam and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua. She showed Jesus his place in the stories, and helped him see God's providence woven through history. She helped him make sense of his destiny. She did this because – for

the vast majority of human history – faith formation was woman’s work. It was women who held the keys to the kingdom, who made sure the faith was passed from generation to generation. She engaged Jesus in public worship when she could – but faith formation, like all character formation - was a home based activity. She coloured it red by steeping it in the emotions of home, by rooting it in the unique love of a parent for a child, and tying who he was becoming with bonds of blood. Faith at home is coloured red.

But the Mission Jesus was on was never meant to stay home. You are the light of the world, he would go on to announce. A city on a hill cannot be hidden and neither does one light a candle and hide it under a basket. Faith is yellow. Bright, vibrant and alive – faith, as Jesus lived, stands out. It glows in the dark, illuminating all around it. Faith in life is coloured yellow.

So what does any of this have to do with Timothy?

As Paul writes this, Christianity is still in relative infancy. Written in the early 60s, the great debate of who gets to define Christianity was raging. Is it a sect of Judaism, or something for the whole world? Is it something that we are born into, or something we opt into instead? What this passage does is illuminate that question and in doing so, provides us with an understanding of faith that has stood the test of time. And it is this:

Powerful faith happens at the intersection of Church and Home.

This is Paul’s thesis: when the spirit is at work in the lives of God’s people, it will make itself known. When Beth and I were first dating, I wanted to be as impressive as I could, so I decided to cook her a big fancy dinner. So I pulled out all the stops and made a seafood pasta that would knock your socks off. But we found out it only takes one bad shrimp to leave a very different impression than you had hoped. (By the way, if you want to find out if they’re the one, get food poisoning. If they stick around, marry them!) Hopefully, it’s usually in a more positive context – but that’s the kind of thing Paul means when he talks about a spirit of power. Dynamism is a more accurate translation than power anyway. Paul means that the spirit that lives inside us makes its presence known the same way that single bad shrimp made its presence known in the batch. It produces. It is dynamic.

The spirit is the single greatest evangelistic tool that the church has ever been given. It is way better than any sermon ever could be; it has changed more lives than any program ever could; it has gone deeper and wider than any mission would dream.

It means our love looks different than the way the world does it.

It means our self-control looks different than the way the world does it.

I’ll come back to these in a minute.

Paul is reminding Timothy that he has an obligation as a follower of Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit lives, to make sure that his life is dynamically different than the lives of those around him.

That's what powerful faith means. And powerful faith happens at the intersection of church and home.

It starts at home. "Rekindle the gift that is in you", Paul writes. Fan your faith into flame. Remember the family Bible readings, and prayers before meals and at bed time. But know that the faith that only stays at home will stay small.

Your Home needs church because Family can't give something they don't have.

Every family has blind spots. I can't skate, so there is no way I'm ever going to be able to teach Elyse how to skate. It's the same with faith. We all struggle with what it means to be faithful people in a world of faithlessness. There are parts of Christianity that come easier to me than other parts. And if the only faith I can pass on to my daughter is the broken, flimsy, cheap faith that is in me – if that's all I've got, I'm setting my daughter up to fail. Connecting the next generation with a faith family isn't something we do for ourselves. It's something we do for them. It's why the covenant promises of baptism should matter so much to all of us. Every time we pass a child through those waters, we are all staking a claim in his or her faith development. We understand, intrinsically, that my faith on its own – even the faith of two parents – is incomplete. If we want our kids to have a shot at inheriting powerful faith, we need to crowd-source our faith.

And that is a choice parents have to make every single week, because the world is telling us in no uncertain terms, that our self-sufficiency is of chief importance. Be enough, be everything your kids need in this life – and you'll be successful as a parent. Make sure your kids are at the top of their game in art, sports, music, and a dozen other activities while they continue to excel at school and maintain a social life. Do all that for your kids, while you try and maintain a healthy relationship with a spouse, and hold down a full time job.

The world is happy to sell us that bill of goods. But Paul urges us to see it for what it is: unsatisfying if our goal is passing on powerful faith to our kids. Your kids need to know that you know you are incomplete, and the church – this community of belief – is what lets us transform our faith from ember to inferno.

But at the same time,

Church needs home because Faith is too important to only be given one hour a week

A study published a few years ago looked at the amount of influence adults have on the lives of children, as it relates to faith, and the likelihood of continued adult participation in faith. It's

one of those studies they make you read in seminary that's designed to knock us down a few pegs. Because Ministers and Pastors ranked sixth on the list of influencers. We actually come in behind "other adults" – like coaches or neighbours. Fourth on the list is teachers, third is grandparents – and to no one's surprise, parents are at the top of the list. Moms are actually number two, and dads are the single greatest indicator of continuing adult participation in faith. But parents, and grandparents are the trifecta. That's what touched Paul so deeply about Timothy's faith.

So if you're hoping that by bringing your kids to church so that you don't have to teach them the faith, I've got bad news for you. This is, at best, the sixth best place you can bring them for that.

Think about it. There are 168 hours in a week. If we give faith the same amount of exposure as a guitar lesson, we shouldn't be surprised if they treat the guitar lesson with more seriousness, because at least you have to practice that before your next lesson.

Faith is too important to only give it an hour a week.

So let me suggest three ways to make faith part of your family culture:

- 1) Make it visual

Make a calendar to track the important seasons in the church year; get a Bible with pictures you can look at together. Put whatever they come up with at Sunday School on the fridge and ask them about it later in the week. Decorate your space with inspirational quotes or bible passages. Images trigger our brains to remember differently than words do.

- 2) Create Regular rituals and traditions

Kids love repetition. It's how they learn. Find what they love to do, and turn it into a tradition. Cook pancakes after church,

- 3) Reinforce with elaboration and repetition

When you know the rituals, traditions, and values your family has, be sure to talk about them often. This helps children feel a sense of security and belonging and makes the family unit something to be proud of.