

Transitioning Into God's Family

Key Verses

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Principles

This passage in Ephesians models the type of family dynamics that God desires for us to experience within His Family. It provides an example for parenting as well. Let's take a look at each of the main principles here and how you, as a parent, can not only implement these into your own family dynamics, but also, prepare your children to enter into this type of culture within the Church as they move into adulthood.

1. **“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”** *Walk in a manner* means to live life a certain way. We need to ask, “Which way?” Well, the way that aligns to the “calling” to which you have been called. Which calling is that? The call to adoption into God’s Family as His sons and daughters (See Ephesians 1:5-6). In other words, Paul is encouraging the Ephesians to live life in a way that is consistent with the culture of God’s Family. He then goes on in verses 2 and 3 to explain the attributes of this culture. The question then arises, “How does someone learn to live life according to this way?” Paul answers that in verses 11-16.
2. **“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry.”** The role of these gifted leaders in the Church is to equip the rest of the Church for the work of ministry. This work of ministry is then described by Paul as “the building up of the body of Christ...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In other words, the work of ministry is to help believers transform in their interior worlds to more and more reflect the interior world of Jesus, thereby enabling them to not only participate in, but also contribute to perpetuating God’s Family Culture in the context of the local Church.
3. **“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up.”** The word “Rather” compares what comes before to what comes after that word. Before the word “Rather,” there is a description given of the unstable person who has not yet been built up, aptly referred to as “children.” Children, a.k.a., new believers in Christ or those who have not grown since they became believers in Christ, are those who are “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” They have not learned to live in God’s Family Culture. This is the state of every person born, including your biological children. But, there is hope of transformation. After the word “Rather,” Paul describes the process and the result of the entire body participating in the work of ministry. It involves speaking the truth in the context of loving relationships (for the benefit of the other person at a cost to you) and viewing one another as intricate members of God’s Family to the point where we are all giving and receiving in the Body of Christ. The result is unity and stability that are rooted in love where we are all experiencing God’s Family Culture as the Body builds itself up in love.

Questions/Discussion

Considering the process and result of operating in a healthy culture of God’s Family described by Paul, following are some questions to help you process this in the context of parenting. You may also use them as you disciple others into parenting according to God’s design.

1. Notice the framework of a healthy Church: Jesus gives gifted leaders to the Church. Those gifted leaders sacrifice to invest into and equip others for the work of ministry and for maturity. Those “children” who choose to submit to the leadership of the local Church grow to the point where they become “adults” who can speak the truth in love to others to help them grow. Think through your own family culture. How are you doing at equipping your children to become adults who can contribute to the betterment of society?
2. Modeling is the one of the key ways that you can impact your kids. According to these verses, you are a “child” who needs to come under the gifted leaders of the Church given by Jesus so you can spiritually grow up into “adulthood.” How was participation in Body life modeled for you by your parents/guardians when you were growing up? How well are you modeling it now for your kids?

What excuses do you tend to use to limit your participation in the Church? How have you seen your lack of participation affect your kids?

3. We have the opportunity as parents to prepare our kids to participate in Church Body life. One of the ways this is done is through being equipped so you can speak the truth in love to your own kids. Do you feel equipped to be able to teach your kids from the Bible? If so, are you doing this? How is it going? If you do not feel equipped, are you willing to get equipped? [The answer to this question will help you encourage the parents you are discipling to either step up their engagement in an MC or to make a commitment to get involved in an MC. The equipping that they need occurs as they come under the teaching of the elders, participate in an MC where they can be helped to wrestle with the Truth at the CONSIDER level, and find practical ways to live out the truth (PRESENT) in relationships with other believers and their kids. It's the long-game approach.]
4. If your kids are older (mid-to-late teens) they should be building relational connections within your/their Missional Community (NOT YOUTH GROUP) to help them transition from being “under your direct authority” to being under Jesus’ authority and His design for the Church. This can be a very challenging time because they still need your guidance, yet, they also need a bit of freedom to begin putting into practice the discipline and instruction they have received from you up to this point in their lives. They need to make some mistakes and learn from the consequences of those mistakes. What might be some fears you have in giving your kids some freedom to make mistakes?

If your kids are younger, it is helpful for them to start building relationships with other trusted adults in your Missional Community. It is important for them to see the MC as their MC as well. They will do this best by observing how you model this. Kids tend to value what we value. This will produce huge benefits later as they transition into independence from you.

If your kids are older, they need to begin the process of moving out from under your authority into dependence on Jesus’ authority and coming under His design for the Church. This is a very scary process for parents. Letting out the reigns gives your kids the freedom to make some mistakes along the way. It is necessary for them to be allowed to make some of those decisions and to experience the consequences of those decisions. It gives you an opportunity (or someone else within their/your MC) to help them navigate life by thinking through Truth and how it applies to the current situation.

Obviously, the freedoms you give your kids must be age-level appropriate. The older they become, the more freedoms they should be given. Giving too many freedoms too soon can become overwhelming for them and they will fail miserably and cause great stress in your relationship with them. Keeping a tight hold of the reigns for too long creates a high pressure environment where your kids will begin to openly rebel against you as they press out on their own. You must prayerfully consider which freedoms to give, how much of those freedoms to give, how to encourage them when they do well, and how to help them when they mess it up. All of this is dependent on knowing your child well so you can “train your child up in who your child is” at this point in their journey toward Jesus.

Cautions! We think it necessary to communicate some cautions here.

1. It's easy to become fruit inspectors and polishers as a parent. This means we are always looking at the actions of our kids and trying to come up with ways to get our kids to DO the right things. This approach is often based on a parent's identity being rooted in their child's behavior. "My kid does well, I receive glory and accolades from others. My kid screws it up, I look like an idiot in front of my peers. Since I want to look good to others, I pressure my kids to perform well."

This approach develops major hurdles for your kids when it's time for them to relate to God outside of the sphere of your influence. It's super harmful to them. They build a functional belief system that performance is what builds a relationship with God and I must perform well to make Him look good and get Him to accept me.

2. We can become so fearful as parents, that outside influences are going to mess up our kids, that we take on a tribal mentality within our family. A tribal mentality says, "I can't trust anyone outside of this family to have any influence over my kids. So, I must minimize any and all outside influences. This family is all that matters. We will only interact with others in very controlled environments."

This stems from the core belief that your kids are basically good and will only get messed up by outside environmental and social factors. In other words, you can help to keep them good by minimizing these outside influences. It's the "us four and no more" mentality. Obviously, there is wisdom in protecting our kids from influences. But, we can tend to take it to the extreme such that participating in the Body of Christ is limited and engagement with the lost is virtually non-existent. This sets our kids up for failure to participate in the mission of God because they see it as "too risky" for their well-being. And, when it's time for them to parent, they will pass on the "tribal legacy" to their children. This fortress mentality is contrary to Jesus' example and his mission to reach the lost and we must fight against it if we are to raise our kids with His lifestyle in mind.

3. Failure to Cut the Cords of Allegiance and Dependence. This is a big one for parents who have kids moving into their twenties. Your goal for your kids must be that, by the time they graduate from high school, they can function mostly independent from your oversight in areas of moral choices and participation in Body life. This means they know how to think through situations from a biblical perspective and have had practice at knowing the truth, considering the truth, and presenting themselves to God while under your supervision. They also know how to engage as an active member of the Body of Christ on their own because you've encouraged them to build relationships with others independent from you.

They may at times seek guidance from others rather than you. This should be encouraged by you. You want your kids to move into a position where they more and more see themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ along with you serving Jesus in His Church and mission. You've not given up your parental rights, and, if you've done your parenting job well, as they navigate life, they will have your model as an example. They will come back to you to have real discussions about how to work through their most recent challenges in life.

If you fail to cut the cords of allegiance and dependence (because you are still finding your identity in your children), they will not launch well! It will be like a car moving down the road with four flat tires that are also bald. The car can still move and it is heading somewhere, but there will be much difficulty and damage along the way! You must prepare yourself and you kids for their release! They already want it. They eventually will need it. And they will ultimately push for it whether you are ready for it or not!

Further Study/Discipleship

Growing as parents, and discipling others in this particular area is not for the faint of heart, nor is it accomplished through one short video and discussion. Below are a few additional passages that can be used to further discuss with and disciple others through this content.

John 21:15-19

Jesus had spent three intense years investing into Peter (and the other apostles) as Peter's spiritual "Father" if you will. Near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter denied Jesus for the sake of protecting himself. After Jesus' resurrection, it was near the time that Peter and the other disciples would be released to take on the ministry for which Jesus had been preparing them.

By many accounts, some would say that these knuckleheads were definitely "not ready" to take on the responsibility of leadership in the Church. Yet, Jesus knew them well. They were not perfect and would continue to make mistakes along the way, but Jesus believed they were ready enough for what was ahead.

Read John 21:15-19. This was a personal conversation between Jesus and Peter in one of Jesus' last moments with Peter after his resurrection and before his ascension. Jesus was "releasing" Peter into a fruitful life of ministry.

1. What necessary component was Jesus emphasizing to Peter in order for him to have a fruitful ministry as a leader in the Church? How does this compare to John 15:1-11?
2. In what ways does/could your life model to your kids the importance of loving Jesus over performing the right deeds?
3. In what ways can you help your kids grow in loving Jesus more than performing the right deeds in order to prepare them for their release into a life of fruitful ministry for Jesus? (Notice how Jesus did not scold Peter for denying Him, but focused on Peter's love for Jesus.)

Acts 1:4-9

Read Acts 1:4-9. These are the very last words that Jesus gave to his disciples before departing from them in order to prepare them for the ministry to come. The disciples were to wait on God to move before they went out to reach the lost for Him. Once they received His Spirit, they operated in His power to accomplish the ministry that Jesus had prepared for them.

4. In what ways does your life model a dependence on God and operating in the leading of the Holy

Spirit to engage in life (marriage, parenting, ministry within the Church, relationships with others outside the Church, your employment, etc.)?

5. How can you help your kids grow in their dependence on God and following the leading of His Spirit so they can engage life according to Jesus' model and design?