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Ministering to Children

Once we begin to understand the fullness of the gospel we find our perspective on everything about ministry begins to change. We no longer see our calling as one to “get” people saved but as a calling to help others “be” saved. (See “Don’t *Get* Saved, *Be* Saved’ in *The Adopted Life*, Special Issue 1.)

Youth and children’s ministry is no exception. We once saw young people as born into this world disconnected from God. We thought our job was to help them get into Christ and get Christ into themselves. Now we no longer regard anyone from such a human point of view (2 Cor. 5:15,) but we see everyone - including young people - through the lens of Jesus.

Children, from the day they are born, live and move and exist in Christ (Acts 17:28) and together with all creation have already been reconciled to the Father in him (Col. 1:20.) Therefore, since they are in Christ and he is in them (Eph. 1:23) they are participating from day one in the love, joy and peace of the Triune Life of God through the Holy Spirit.

Our calling, then, is to help them see the truth about who God is and who they are. Our calling is to love them, pray for them and with them, and include them in our lives in the name of Jesus. In this way they will come to see their own inclusion in Jesus’ life. After all, that is what Jesus does for us. He loves us, prays for and with us, and includes us in the life he shares with the Father and the Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit that brings love and joy into our children’s lives is at work in our lives, sharing with us the love he has for our kids and inviting us to believe that he is telling them the truth about their life in Christ. When we speak faithfully to our kids of the life they already have in Christ we are in step with the Spirit and we can have great faith and confidence that young people will believe what we say because the Spirit gives them faith to believe.

There is a similarity in our experience to the experience of Israel. When Israelite parents had a child that child was Israelite from day one for the same reason that all members of Israel were part of Israel. Not because of anything they did or said but because of the Father’s gracious choice to make them his people.

The Lord did not call Israel to convert their kids to “Israelitism” as they grew up. He called on them to help their children understand the truth about who God is and who they are.

In the same way our children are participants in the life of Christ from day one for the same reason that all humanity is in Christ. Not because of anything we have done or said but because of the Father’s gracious choice to make humanity his people in his Son (Eph. 2:15.) So, also, our calling is to help our kids understand who they really are in Christ and who God really is as Father, Son, and Spirit adopting them into his life and existence.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 20-21, we see the Lord’s instruction to Israel about how to do youth ministry. To apply these ideas into our own lives we must read these words through the lens of who Jesus is and what he has revealed to us about his Father. Below are these verses, interpreted in a

Christ centered way to help us see what youth ministry might look like in the light of the good news of Jesus.

Hear, O Church: The LORD our God, the LORD is one; he is Father, Son and Spirit. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. This good news about your life in Jesus is to be upon your hearts. Impress it on your children. Talk about your life in Christ when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie Jesus as a symbol on your hands and bind him on your foreheads. Write him on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. In the future, when your children ask you, "What is the meaning of this gospel the LORD our God has given you?" tell them: "We were lost but now we're found, the Father has adopted us and raised us to new life in Christ."

~ Jonathan Stepp