

**We are Witnesses: To Our Family**

May 13, 2007

Acts 16:9-15

Pastor John Wertz, Jr.  
St. Michael Lutheran Church  
Blacksburg, VA

I went to a conference a couple of years ago

- that is now called Passing On Faith.

- It was a series of workshops and presentations

- that focused on how faith is transmitted from one generation to the next.

- As a part of his presentation,

- Pastor David Anderson

- shared a statistic from a study of Protestant Churches.

- According to the study,

- when youth were asked to list

- “Who or what has influenced your life of faith?” -

- the majority of the group about 75% of girls and 81% of boys said

- “Mother”.

- After mother came “Father” who was

- included on the list of influences by

- 50% of girls and 61% of boys.

- Pastor came in third on the list

- included by 44 % of girls and 57% of boys.

- Bible, by the way,

- was only included by 24% of girls and 25% of boys.

(Published in *Frogs without Legs Can't Hear* by David Anderson and Paul Hill, Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003)

- Now, I am not one to easily trust statistics.
  - I know how easy it is to make a set of numbers say
    - exactly what you want them to say,
      - but my own experience
        - and the experiences shared with me by many of you
          - and by others with whom I have discussed this
  - teaches me
    - that these statistics
      - accurately reflect the experience
        - of most Christians.
- For in most cases,
  - faith is transmitted through families.
    - I know that this is true in my own life
      - and I know that was true for Lydia's family
        - in our reading today from Acts.
  - We hear how Paul goes to Philippi
    - to teach people about the promise and hope
      - that comes to us through Jesus Christ.
  - While he is there,
    - Paul speaks to a group of women who have gathered.
      - In that group is Lydia,
        - a business woman,
          - who listens eagerly to what Paul is teaching
            - and believes in Jesus.

- Lydia, however, doesn't just believe
  - and then go back to her life.
    - Did you notice what it says in verse 15 - -
      - “When she and her household were baptized” (*Acts 15:15, NRSV*)
- Lydia doesn't just believe,
  - but Lydia shares her belief in Jesus with others.
    - Her entire household is baptized,
      - because Lydia is a witness to her family - -
        - because she is bold enough
          - to share her faith with those closest to her.
- I know that most of the time
  - when people talk about sharing their faith,
    - they are talking about reaching out to people they don't know.
      - Most of the time, if you hear someone say
        - they are witnessing to their faith,
          - they mean they are reaching out to someone
            - in the community or around the world
              - who doesn't know how much
                - God loves them.
  - What I think we see in the story of Lydia,
    - what I think we see in the study Pastor Anderson shared with the conference,
      - what I think we know from our own experience
        - is that witnessing to God's love for us in Jesus Christ
          - doesn't just happen *out there* somewhere in the world,

- but happens most often and most effectively
  - in the midst of our families.
- Now your family may consist of mother, father and children.
  - Your family may consist of grandparents, grandchildren and cousins.
    - Your family may consist of brothers and sisters.
      - Your family may consist of your three best friends in the world.
        - Your family may consist of the people you work with each day.
  - Whatever your family looks like,
    - it is a powerful place where faith can be intentionally shared and nurtured.
- That's what Lydia does for her family.
  - That's what millions of Christians have done through the centuries,
    - and that's what you can do for your family as well.
- For in the midst of your family
  - through Caring Conversation,
    - through Family Devotional times,
      - through Service,
        - and through Family Rituals and Traditions,
          - you can witness to God's love in Jesus Christ
            - in powerful, meaningful ways.

(These Four Keys for Nurturing FaithLife are adapted from *Frogs without Legs Can't Hear* by David Anderson and Paul Hill, Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003)

Each of these four keys for nurturing faith in families

- offers an avenue
  - for witnessing to what you believe -

- offers an opportunity
  - for you to share your faith
    - with the people you love most in the world.

- You don't have to do all four perfectly.

- As I often say,

- pick one area to start with,
  - and try to grow that one area into a strength
    - in your life.

- Don't worry about all four,

- just start with one.

So you might start with Caring Conversation. - -

- We have conversations with our families all the time.

- We talk about sports.

- We talk about the weather.

- We talk about what's happening in the world.

- In these conversations, a great deal of information is exchanged and absorbed.

- You might learn about flowers or math or business, but

- what if you decided to be intentional

- about including your faith in your conversations.

- It might be through telling stories about how you have seen God present

- in your life.

- It might be through asking a question at lunch on Sunday

- concerning what you experienced in worship or Sunday School.

- It might mean making a point of talking about how your faith

- helps you face a time of grief and loss,
- providing hope in times of tragedy.
- When you talk about faith your family listens.
  - They may not always appear to be listening.
    - Or They may respond with difficult questions of faith
      - that you need to explore together.
        - Either way they are listening
          - and you are witnessing to your family.
- Perhaps you choose to add
  - Family Devotional Time to your life.
    - Kris and I make a point of doing this with Corson and Parker.
      - We pray with them every night before they go to bed.
        - Sometimes it's simply the Lord's Prayer,
          - Sometimes we add others prayers,
            - but always we pray together.
  - You might start with prayer at meals.
    - You might use a book like "365 Daily Devotions for Kids"
      - that I have in my office.
  - You might just agree upon a family time to read scripture together
    - or you might agree upon a specific devotional practice
      - that you are each going to do on your own.
- It doesn't have to be complicated.
  - It definitely needs to be something
    - that fits the pattern and style of your life,

- but whatever you choose,
  - sharing devotional time can be a powerful witness to God's love.
- You might add Service
  - to your life of faith.
    - Look for a project you can do together.
      - Head down to Slidell, LA with me when I go back in the fall.
        - Pick out a gift for the angel tree at Christmas.
  - Go buy groceries together for the Montgomery County Emergency Assistance Program.
    - Living out your faith in active, hands-on ways
      - can be a powerful witness to God's love.
- Or you might develop family rituals and traditions.
  - Perhaps you create a place in your home that reflects the season of the church year
    - or you have a prayer of thanksgiving at the end and beginning of a school year.
      - Perhaps you give alternative gifts through Heifer International
        - or simply find ways to include your faith in the milestones of life
          - like birthdays, graduations and anniversaries.
  - Pick one area
    - not all four
      - and be intentional about sharing God's love.

Like Lydia before us,

- We are witnesses to our families.
  - We are the ones
    - God gifts and calls
      - to help the people we love

- to know that God loves them too.

- And while I know

- that even in the best of family settings,

- there are days and times

- when you may not feel all that loving

- and you may not feel like your efforts to share your faith

- are accomplishing anything - - -

- The good news we hear today

- is that God works in and through the witness of families

- to reveal the power and the hope

- of God's love for us in Jesus Christ our Lord.