The salvation and discipleship of children within the dynamics of the family

by

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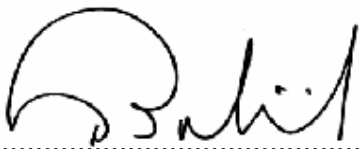A Bachelor of Theology Thesis

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

Signed:..   Date:. 31 July 2009   ...

Table of contents

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Opening remarks

Through this thesis I would like to do a literature review on an important issue which affects all parents. Children are born into a family environment and it is here where they should experience salvation and discipleship. If they are exposed and trained in spiritual matters at an early age they will be able to live out God's purpose also for their lives with specific reference to the Great Commission. Modern families are exposed to so many different issues that in many instances, parents are not creating the environment where children may experience salvation and discipleship (Campbell 1992). The causes of this are numerous and may even differ from culture to culture and as a result parents tend to shift the responsibility elsewhere (Strommen and Hardel 2000:8)

1.2 The study to be conducted

The study to be conducted will be a literature research on the area of salvation and discipleship of children within the dynamics of the family and will also endeavour to look at possible effects this could have on the child's spiritual maturity and further inclusion into the greater community. The focus will be more directed at a western perspective rather than an African, Middle-east or Eastern culture where many different issues may abound.

1.3 The value of the study

This research could place a new perspective on the way parents view their responsibility of leading their children into a loving relationship with God and teaching them discipleship skills. Making use of recent literature reviews could bring different perspectives of this issue together and assist in further discussions on the matter.

1.4 The aim of the study

The aims of the study are the following:

1.4.1 To discuss the dynamics of the family.

1.4.2 To discuss the need for salvation and discipleship of children.

1.4.3   To discuss the responsibilities of parents in this process.

1.4.4   To discuss the possible effects of this process in the spiritual maturity of children.

1.5   The objectives of the study

To provide a literature review on the following:

1.5.1   A short description of the dynamics of the family.

1.5.2   To explore the need for children to experience salvation and discipleship skills.

1.5.3   To explore some Scriptural evidence into God's desire for children within the family context.

1.5.4   To provide parents with some background knowledge to enable them to effectively reach out to their children.

1.5.5   To explore children's inclusion into the larger community including the Church.

1.5.6   To draw some conclusion from the researched literature.

1.6   Preliminary literature review

The Barna Group in Robinson (2002:§5) did a study on salvation in the United States of America and found that the "the vast majority of the population who are saved experience the conversion during childhood, before the age of 14" which constitutes a 32 percent in the age group of 5 to 13 years as opposed to the age group 14 to 18 with a mere 4%. They further postulate that "a person who is unsaved at the age of 14 only has a 10% chance of being saved later in life". It is imperative that children should be introduced and trained in discipleship during their childhood years making every effort to include the children to "make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19)[1]. Gurney (2007:97) adds that "we introduce our children to Christianity but fail to teach them how to live out their faith through relevant, practical and ongoing teachings". The Bible in Acts 2:39 mention that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for all, those present at the occasion, their descendants, which include the children, and in addition those that are 'far off' including all those scattered throughout the world.

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

This certainly embraces the full grace of God which is all inclusive (Marshall 1980:81-82).

The question may be asked: Who is primarily responsible to evangelize and disciple the child? In Jewish culture, the parents played an active role in the spiritual well-being of their children. Krallmann (1992:19-23) suggests that "Jesus' educational development occurred within the perimeter of the ordinary Jewish upbringing of the day". Through His godly parents Jesus was introduced to the religious customs of the day as well as Jewish festivities. In close association with His parents He learnt language, educational and other important skills including an appreciation for relationships. Boyatzis and Janicki (2003:252) states that "parents establish "religious capital" for their children upon which children's religious beliefs and attitudes may grow".

Fairchild (1964:13-15) reveals that modern-day parents do not have the time or even the resources or training to take up their responsibility to build spiritual values into the lives of their children. More than often the parents also do not live out their God-given calling and hence have a low level of spiritual maturity (Gurney 2007:96). This has a direct effect on how the parent would approach the task and they would shift their responsibility elsewhere. Campbell (1992:14) also concludes that because of pressures and strains mounting on modern families on a daily basis, many families become confused and discouraged.

Families are a place of relationships and as Strommen and Hardel (2000:15) mentions, one of God's desires for families has to do with relationships that need to be built between parents and children. Parents should create the atmosphere and the loving relationship in which the child could experience salvation and discipleship that would enable the child to grow spiritually and take up his/her rightful place in the larger church community.

1.7 The research question

The main research question is the following:

What is the role of the family in evangelizing and discipleship of children so that they can live mature lives and take their place within the community of believers?

1.8 The key questions

The key questions concerning the literature review are the following:

1.8.1 What is the children's need for salvation and discipleship within the family context?

1.8.2 What is God's desire for children that could assist us to effectively evangelize and disciple children within the dynamics of the family?

1.8.3 What responsibilities do parents have, within the dynamics of the family, in the salvation and discipleship process of children?

1.8.4 What effect would the salvation and discipleship of children in the family have on their inclusion in the greater community including the Church?

1.9 Research methodology

This thesis is a literature review over the past 25 to 30 years. To collect the information I made use of books, journals, online articles, dissertations and the Holy Scriptures. To analyse and interpret the information I made use of the following tools: dialogical, complementary, epistemological, comparative and analytical. The conclusion is drawn from the literature review.

Chapter Two

The need within the dynamics of the family

In this chapter I will endeavour to focus on family dynamics, it's makeup as well as the need of children within this environment with specific reference to salvation and discipleship.

2.1 Definition of the family

There are many factors which determine the dynamics or 'make-up' of a family. Fairchild (1964:15) explains that families do not differ so much in the experiences they have but are different in the way they interpret those experiences and the specific understanding or meaning they give to what they do as families.

2.1.1 Constitution of the family

The question may be asked: What constitutes a family? Many terms may be used to refer to one's family or of one's 'own' but there are certain things which must be looked at when referring to a family or household, in this case. It can be argued that a family is there where one feels at home or is comfortable and where one may experience love, security, acceptance etc. For the purpose of this thesis let us restrict the definition to the following two examples: "Family will mean for us, primarily, married parents living together with their children who are related to them by blood or adoption" (Fairchild 1964:12). Fairchild also states further that a family is changing daily but remains a "sensitive organism similar to the human body". The other definition includes the following: "Our family is those people with whom we share our faith, values, and purpose as they relate to a life of hope and love" (Strommen and Hardel 2000:17).

The first definition is largely restricted to the western communities.   In the African context, for example, the second definition may be more appropriate. It is here where more emphasis is placed on the larger community with others of the same extended family. O'Donovan (1996:4) argues that "Africans tend to find their identity and meaning in life through being part of their extended family, clan and tribe." Muslim families are usually part of a complex, interrelated family structure and may even extend across borders and continents. Family loyalty and unity plays a very important role here (Haines 1998:74-75).

2.1.2 The modern family

The modern family is under huge pressure often resulting in disintegration. Since the 1940's, church leaders are worried that many families are either falling apart or at risk to fall apart including those families with strong religious backgrounds (Garland 1996:§4). As society is undergoing what may be termed as the fastest, most threatening cultural change in human history, it is transforming every area of everyday life, including the family (McDowell and Hostetler 1998:8). The modern parent is finding it difficult to relate to this fast changing culture whereas children are more receptive to the changes and moving further and further away form the "traditional" family culture. The gap between parent and child is becoming greater. Children speak a different language than parents do. It is not confined to the 'traditional slang' of the past and although the language used by children today sound familiar it has totally different meanings (p.11).

Collins (2007:588) touches on other forces which constantly shake and mould homes and families and categorises them into three: "catastrophic change, persistent pressure and pervasive pessimism". He also refers to different causes of family problems which differs from culture to culture, for example, events, experiences and influences, different worldviews of families with reference to religion and values, expectations for the future and the impact of decisions on families. In the African context it matters what the community thinks (p.591). Ancestral worship and communication with the spirit world is a reality in African Traditional religions (O'Donovan 1996:4).

More than often families do not know which way to turn or where to go for guidance.

2.2 The perspective

One could turn to the social sciences to attain some sort of meaning and facts on the perspective of families or one could turn to the Scriptures for an answer.

2.2.1 Guidance

Gurney (2007:85) states "God had His divine administration over the writing of His word." The Bible was written by humans but led by the Holy Spirit to do so. This means that all Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Although the Scriptures do not say much about family life and how they should function, it does provide certain relevant and important teachings. For example, it does mention that the

father is the head of the family which include specific responsibilities (Ephesians 5). It also teaches certain aspects concerning the wife. Collins (2007:590) argues and defends this and more by stating that most of the New Testament can be regarded and applied as a guidebook for individual families as a unit.

Although the social sciences do provide valuable information in respect of different aspects of family dynamics like the 'what, when and how' but ultimately, the Scriptures provide necessary guidance for families on the meaning and purpose of it all (Fairchild 1964:16). There is a relation, however, between the social science and the Scriptures to better understand family dynamics.

2.2.2 Christocentric perspective

Another area that warrants mentioning is the Christ centric perspective. As no person can live without a commitment to some form of a value system, so the family cannot live without this commitment. Garland (1996:§9) mentions that to live righteously and lovingly is one of the most important Christian disciplines we all face as Jesus mentioned in John 13:34-35.

Taking Jesus as an example of one's family life one cannot attempt to imitate the specific pattern of Jesus' family life by, for example, staying unmarried. Fairchild (1964:17) states the following:

> The Christian life is not a slavish copying of Jesus' life, but our intention, in spite of repeated failure, is to fulfil God's purpose for our unique existence as Christ did for his.

Jesus is our perfect example and the family needs to see its existence including experiences and decisions in the light of what Jesus said and did. There are numerous examples of different family dynamics in the Scriptures, for example, that of Jacob labouring for seven years for his wife or that of Solomon who had more than 700 wives which we cannot merely take as the norm. These characters moved in the context of their own society. God is ever present and entered into history through Jesus Christ, including that of family life and within this covenant community of the family He chose to guide His people. McWilliams (1996:§1) mentions that the Gospels does not just teach about Christ's ministry but is given as a pattern to follow. It is more than a biography of Christ being a complete picture of the Master's plan.

2.3 The implications

2.3.1 Unity

There is a great need for unity amongst God's people. This has been the desire of God since the beginning and in Ephesians 4 and 5 Paul gives us a description of God's desire. Unity is only possible within the context of our relationship with God through Christ. Jesus saw life as a unity under the sovereignty of God (Fairchild 1964:19). Everyday experiences are important to God and especially true within the family environment. One's relationship with God has as much to do with everyday experiences as it does with spiritual or religious issues. Within the family environment there needs to be unity between the spiritual and the earthly things as much as there needs to be unity between all members of the family.

Paul gives some direction in this regard in Romans 12:1 where he states that even our bodies should be presented as a living sacrifice to God. This includes the full spiritual, physical and material side of one's life. Within the family the members become united in their commitment to God in everyday issues as well as religion. Collins (2007:588) refers to how Robert Coles, a Harvard psychiatrist, sees the family:

> A means by which people pull together, learn from one another, gain mutual strength, and sometimes collectively fail, but still nevertheless persist.

2.3.2 Reality

Within the context of unity, one must not succumb to the idea that perfect families do exist. One must also look at the realities of everyday life and experiences. One can draw a perfect picture of what families should look like but this can be very far from the truth.

There are many forces which impact families. Radical issues like genocide, sexual chaos and money worship (Kreeft and Tacelli 1994:23) are part of every-day living which families are confronted with in many parts of the world. Many other forces also impact modern families, for example, crime, abuse, militant groups with perverted values, teenage pregnancies, poverty, single parenting and still the list is incomplete (Collins 2007:588). It is public knowledge the devastation HIV/AIDS has on families specifically in the African context.

From a Christian perspective though, one can confront these issues within the family with eyes wide open by placing one's faith and hope in Christ, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-3). Garland (1996:§9-10) mentions that the importance of families rests in the fact that families are one of the most significant environments where Christian discipleship can take place. It is here where the pleasant and non-pleasant experiences are felt and dealt with as a unity. It is also a very significant area where witness of God's love and grace is demonstrated. Strommen and Hardel (2000:7) make the following statement: "Families have extraordinary power to shape the lives of their children."

2.4   The vocation of parenthood

Essentially, the family is a place where two key relationships are to be built and maintained. Strommen and Hardel (2000:16) mention that the two key relationships are that of family ties and the relationship with God through Christ. The one encourages bonding between parent and child and the other the bonding with Christ. Parents are responsible to seek to encourage and develop these key relationships which would result in strong, life-shaping families.

2.4.1 Parents for children

No parent is perfect and no family is without flaws. In most cases, parents are not educated in nor have the right skills to raise children. For many years obedience was seen as the one factor which guides and moulds a child (Fairchild 1964:98). Campbell (1992:87) confirms this view held by many parents. In modern societies, however, much confusion exists. Parenthood has become more a problem-solving task instead of something which should come naturally (p.14). The question often asked by parents is: "Am I doing the right thing?"

Before the arrival of children within a family, couples had much time and space to build their relationship. The situation changes drastically when children are born into the family. All time, effort and attention are spent on the children. Fairchild (1964:97) puts it plainly: "The state of parenthood calls for changes in the couple's own relationship". This change should not be seen as an obstacle. In the contrary, it forms new dynamics in which parents can grow together as they share their responsibilities and joys as they foster, guide and mould their children. Teaching

Strategies (2006:138) holds that children flourish in their development when they experience trusting and supportive relationships with their parents.

2.4.2 Children for parents

Attention is often directed to what parents can do for children. The birth of a child reforms the dynamics of the family in more ways than one. The parents have new responsibilities, tasks and commitments. Decisions are now taken with regard to the needs of the child. Through his arrival the child often draws parents closer together as they work for the child's well-being physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. The parents also feel more significant and a sense of importance guides their actions (Fairchild 1964:99). Being involved with children deepens self-awareness. It also helps to stimulate awareness of own feelings and relationships (Teachings Strategies 2006:140). Children also re-introduce their parents to things which they have too long taken for granted. The small things in life become significant again. In a study done among 110 families in different Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian congregations in the USA, most parents interviewed reported that the birth and raising of children have significantly influenced their sense of meaning and purpose in life (Garland 2002:70).

2.5   The need for salvation and discipleship of children

2.5.1 The need for salvation

Children are the neediest persons in today's society and their greatest need is love (Campbell 1992:14). They need to hear but also experience that they are loved. Parents need to know how to convey love to their children by also introducing them to God's love for them. Unique religious socialization occurs through unidirectional transmission of religious beliefs and practices from parent to child (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003:253). There is no greater love that anyone can experience than the love God has for them (John 3:16-17). God's love embraces all of mankind and is not confined to any national group, spiritual elite or age group (Morris 1971:229). God's love is demonstrated to the world, including children, by sending His Son into this world to save it for all are lost and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

Doherty (1996:7-10) discusses different steps in the salvation process that will guide the parent in their endeavour to assist the child: teach about God who is the source of salvation, teach about sin and the need for salvation, teach about Jesus who is the

way of salvation, teach about repentance and faith which is the appropriation of salvation and teach about the results of salvation. Choun, Lawson and Hendricks (2002:117-118) adds to this list and mentions five steps that can serve as a general guideline in ministry to children such as introducing children to God, explaining sin, telling children about Jesus, inviting children to accept Christ in their lives and explaining a life of obedience to them.

2.5.2 The need for discipleship

Children are also in desperate need for discipleship. Before Jesus returned to His heavenly home He gave His disciples what is termed the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).

Many have attempted to define discipleship. I would like to include what Walter Henrichsen (2002:5) mentioned in his book "*Disciples are made and not born*":

> When we invest in the lives of other people, we transmit not only what we know, but more importantly what we are. Each of us becomes like the people with whom we associate. I am sure that if we could meet Paul and Timothy, we would find them similar in many respects.

Krallmann (1992:14) holds that the focus of any discipleship or spiritual leadership is to be like Christ. Jesus set an example for His disciples for them to follow (John 13:15) and this is what the focus of parents should be for their children: Christ likeness. Collinson (2005:242) also mentions that discipleship is aimed at providing skills to a person to become an active follower of Christ and to also participate in Christ's mission to the whole world. Parents need to accept the challenge of living as a disciple of Christ for their children to imitate with the intention to include children in the greater believing community.

Chapter Three

God's desire for salvation and discipleship of children within the dynamics of the family

In this chapter I will endeavour to discuss the strategy God has given parents in their task to lead their children to Christ and guide them in discipleship. I will attempt to discuss God's desire for children within the family by referring to both the Old and the New Testaments. We read of God's promises throughout the Scriptures which are meant for all people. They are, in all aspects, multi-generational (Beisner n.d.:1).

3.1   Salvation celebrated in the family

In Exodus 12, God's people are on the verge of being led out from slavery and into the Promised Land. God gave specific instructions to Moses that he should tell the people to obey. Included in these instructions was God's plan of salvation for His people. God mentions that "each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household" (v.3). God's desire was that every member of the family, including every child, should share in His plan of salvation for His people. It was important to God that each member of the family should receive his/her share according to what each one could eat (v.4b).

The salvation experienced by the people was of such significance that when the children should ask about it, the parents should be in a position to explain what had happened and the reasons for it happening (vv.26-27). A day of remembrance was instituted which was to be kept for all generations. Life Application Study Bible (2005:111) mentions that this was done as a reminder to the older people and as a learning experience for the children. It helped to form and mould the children in their quest for spiritual things. Cole (1973:111) adds that observance of this festival was to preserve traditions and an opportunity to declare God's saving grace.

The situation has not changed in that all people born even today find themselves in a state of lostness before God. Through the incarnation of Christ, the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit we can experience salvation within the family. Jesus tells a parable to the people of a farmer who sowed his seed. He mentions four different soils the seed falls in but only one delivers the fruit: the good soil (Matthew 13:1-9).

The foundation was right for the seed. Gurney (2007:95) mentions that "it is imperative that children are provided with a firm foundation in their Christian faith; so that they will not stray at a later stage". Reference can again be made to the Barna Group in Robinson (2002:§4) who and emphasised that a larger percentage of Christians experienced salvation before their 14th birthday. It makes sense then to teach children within the family context the way of salvation and to disciple them to reach spiritual maturity.

3.2 Transmission of truths within the family

In Deuteronomy God's chosen people are in the desert after being led out of Egypt. God is in the process of teaching and guiding His people in spiritual as well as moral and physical issues. In Deuteronomy 6 we find God giving further instructions to love Him as the Lord their God. God tells them that the commands He has given are to be a part of their everyday life and experiences. The home and family makes up a large section of these instructions where God states:

> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates (vv.7-9).

Craigie (1976:170) emphasises the importance of God's commandments being an integral part of the Israelites lives. Their relationship with God and obedience should be based upon their understanding and not formal legalism. They were to discover how God's love for them was given expression.

The Life Application Study Bible (2005:262) adds that God emphasizes the importance of parents teaching Biblical truths to their children. It further states that the Bible provides the parent with many opportunities for lessons and practical teachings that it is a shame that parents rely on the church to provide these teachings only once per week. "Eternal truths are most effectively learned in the loving environment of a God-fearing home" (p.263).

Parents are essential and important actors in their children's journey of faith (Strommen ad Hardel 2000:7). Parents should make God a part of their everyday life and experiences. By doing this they will provide the opportunities for their children to do the same. Parents need to diligently teach their children to see God in all aspects of life. Children should not be limited to what they learn of God at church on

Sundays. God must have meaning in their lives even when they attend school or in shopping malls or when amongst their friends. Gurney (2007:97) states that parents and the church do introduce children to Christianity "but often fail to teach them how to live out their faith through relevant, practical and ongoing teachings".

3.3 Living in accordance with these truths

The best thing that parents can do for their children is to ground them in such a way that they will later make the choice to live a life which really matters (Hunneshagen 2002:190). This same truth we find in the Scriptures:

> Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn
> from it (Proverbs 22:6).

McKane (1970:564) also refers to this truth. He argues that the "task of education is to enable the youth to raise his capabilities to the highest pitch of effectiveness..." By accomplishing this it will set him on the right road.

Gurney (2007:95) then asks the ever important question: "If they are straying we need to ask ourselves if we are in fact training them up at all?" Effective training also involves the issue that children are individuals with specific gifts or talents. Collinson (2005:244) mentions that an integral part of the Christian faith is the "concept of the distinctive significance of each individual in the sight of God" and Kidner (1964:147) confirms the respect for individuality and vocation. Children need to be trained in a way which would be aimed at their specific needs and gifts which they possess.

Yousaf (2006:164) gives some guidelines in the different methods which may be used to effectively minister to children. These methods include discussions, films, nature, interviews, puppets, skits, story-telling, music and many others. The ultimate objective is to effectively evangelize and disciple the children by using these methods.

There are basically three things which parents should want to achieve in their task which is highlighted in Psalm 78. The first reason to teach children is for them to know about these truths (v.6a). Knowledge is crucial. The second is for them to "put their trust in God" (v.7a). The children need to trust God for who He is and His desires for their lives. The third reason is for them to "keep His commands" (v.7b). Kidner (1975:281) confirms this and adds the three fold cord of faith "as personal

trust, informed and humble thinking and an obedient will." He also states that there can be no room for parental neutrality in the teaching of Biblical truths.

Children need to be trained to keep God's commands and become active in what God is doing in the world. God chose to accomplish His mission in a very personal way by involving His people in this task (Blackaby and Willis 1990:56). The foundation of this is by being trained and inspired to live in accordance with the truths they have been taught.

3.4   Children's rightful place

Each member of the body is important and there can be no place for isolated believers. All members have specific gifts and a contribution to make within the community (Collinson 2005:245). Being part of a community also means that all members need each other and have the need for unconditional love: that love which is patient and kind, not irritable or touchy and where a person feels secure, accepted and understood (Campbell 1992:28). Dr. Campbell also emphasises how unconditional love can be classified into four main areas: eye contact, physical contact, focused attention and discipline (p.38).

In some sense, this is what Jesus was demonstrating in Matthew 18. His disciples were concerned about themselves and their own needs and position. Jesus turned His attention from them to a child who was standing nearby, called the child and began to teach. His teaching was aimed at the disciples and those who were present but He also mentioned things which all need to recognise and pay attention to. These things are that all need to be converted and to become like little children (vv.3-4) with specific emphasis being towards the preparation to be insignificant like children: childlikeness (Tasker 1961:175). Children can also believe in Jesus and live according to His commands (v.6).

At a later stage Jesus emphasises that adults should be careful not to look down on the children because "their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven" (v.10). All efforts within the family and the church should be to introduce children to the saving grace of God through Christ and to further develop and disciple them to take up their rightful place within the greater faith community. Gurney (2007:97) discusses this issue and mentions that the absence of a child in Sunday school or Children's Church is just as significant as the absence of an affluent

business person in the church. How often is the mistake made that children are not that important, at least maybe not as important as the business person.

Jesus turned the eyes of His disciples from themselves and focused on the child whom He called to stand among them. The Life Application Study Bible (2005:1572) states that "Our concern for children should match God's treatment of them". Most energy and resources are usually directed at the discipleship of adults and leading them to spiritual maturity. It is rarely heard of that children are included in these efforts. Parents and the church do introduce their children to Christianity but often fail to teach and demonstrate to them how they should live out their faith through relevant and practical teachings (Gurney 2007:97).

3.5 Children in Scripture

There are a number of examples in Scripture where God approached and used children in His mission. The following three examples give us some idea of the power of teaching children at an early age and laying a firm foundation for faith (Gurney 2007:100).

3.5.1 Samuel

The story of Samuel has it's origin in parents who were dedicated to God and His purpose. We read that year after year Elkanah and his family went up from his town to worship before God (1 Samuel 2:3). It was during one of these times that Hannah, one of his wives, stood before the Lord and opened her heart before Him. She received the desire of her heart to become pregnant and later gave birth to Samuel. She returned to stand before the Lord and dedicated her son to the Lord (v.28). Hannah gave all she had to God: her son, her life and her future (Life Application Study Bible 2005:392-393). She was willing to give up that which was most dear to her: for Samuel's whole life he will be given to the Lord.

Later we find Samuel in the house of the Lord ministering before the Lord. God provided yet another tutor for Samuel, the priest Eli. Samuel, as a young boy, wore a linen ephod which was the custom for all priests to wear in their time of service in the Lord's house indicating the he was a priest-in-training. Samuel was also in a very fortunate environment in which Eli gave both his time to the priest-in-learning and also provide opportunities for him to learn. Henrichson (2002:93) holds that these two areas are crucial for a person's development. Also, according to studies done by

Search Institute among all the largest church bodies in America, fewer Christian families are producing children and youth who are committed to Christ's mission. Passing on the faith in families is disappearing resulting from a drastic change in relationship in faith to daily living (Strommen and Hardel 2000:14).

Samuel had the opportunity to be instructed in the ways of the Lord and to have the opportunity to live out his calling. His teaching resulted in service. Even though he was a mere child, he grew in "stature and in favour with the Lord and with men" (1 Samuel 2:26).

3.5.2 King Josiah

Josiah is an example of one who made a decision at a very early age to worship God and do what was right in His sight.

> Josiah was eight years old when he became king; and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty one years...He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left (2 Kings 22:1-2).

The Scriptures mentions that both his grand-father (Manasseh) and his father (Amon) were evil men by doing wicked things before the Lord (2 Kings 21:2, 20). It can be resolved that he did not receive the desired training from his father but probably from his mother, Jedidah and other pious men in prominent positions (Patterson 1988:281). Even though he was still a young child he made the right choices and God honoured him. When one contemplates the truth of 'discipleship', one may draw the conclusion that disciples are life-long followers of Jesus (by choice), who through His power are actively involved in the world to accomplish God's purpose in the world (Hunneshagen 2002:191). Josiah made the choice to do what was right in God's sight and to follow His commands. The words "not turning aside to the right or to the left" points to Josiah's "single-hearted devotion to God's approved course of conduct for his life (Gæbelein 1988:281). He had the temple repaired and renewed the Covenant with God. The Life Application Study Bible (2005:589) holds the following:

> A person's major work for God may have to wait until he or she is an adult, but no one is ever too young to take God seriously and obey Him. Josiah's early years laid the base for his later task of reforming Judah.

Even today, children have the capacity to make the right choices at an early age. These choices lay a strong foundation to enable the child to live out God's plan for their lives at a later stage.

17

3.5.3   Daniel

The life story of Daniel closely resembles that of King Josiah. When Daniel was but a young boy he was taken from his home to a foreign country. Here Daniel, together with other youth, was to be trained to enter the king's service (Daniel 1:5). But Daniel "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine... "(v.8). Daniel made a commitment.   The word 'resolve' means "to decide or determine firmly (McLeod 1985:980)".   Even though he was in a foreign culture he did not give up his convictions and values and still obeyed God's laws which he was taught when still very young.

Again, Proverbs 22:6 comes to mind here. When a child is trained when he is young, he will not depart from or leave this way.   The foundation is laid firm and strong. Jesus taught a similar truth in Matthew 7. He said that a person who hears His words and obeys them is like a person who builds his house on a rock, a firm foundation, and when troubles and temptations come, the house will stand firm. This is not the case, however, with a man who does not hear and obey (Matthew 7:24-27). A strong foundation for a child's faith should be laid at home from where the child may grow and develop to live a life of faith and meaning later as he matures. Hunneshagen (2002:19) confirms that "the foundation for equipping children and youth for the big choices they will make in life is the practice of six disciplines". The six disciplines he refers to are: worship, prayer, bible reading, giving, service and witness.

Chapter Four

Responsibilities of parents in the salvation and discipleship process

In this chapter I will endeavour to discuss the responsibilities that parents have in the salvation and discipleship process of children within the family context. Campbell (1992:9) mentions while discussing the whole issue of parenthood, that the task of "child rearing is in itself a complex venture with which most parents today are having great difficulty." Many parents seek help and understanding in the many literature which is available and much of this literature is excellent but still earnest parents are failing in their attempts. Every failed attempt does not shift the responsibility to some one else. Indeed, no parent is perfect and without flaws. God uses imperfect people as His servants in child-rearing efforts (Fairchild 1964:100). Confusion and discouragement are facts and a reality but the family is still God's chosen way in which children are to be produced and reared to become part of His servant people (p.101). Campbell (1992:14) argues that "any parents who genuinely desire to give a child what he needs, can be taught to do so."

Although there are many responsibilities placed on the shoulders of parents, I would like to discuss a few relating to the salvation and discipleship process of children within the family context.

4.1 Building of relationships

In a study done in rural Oklahoma and later followed and replicated by national and international studies, it was found that strong families were all based upon the following three criteria: happy marriages, satisfying parent-child relationships and their needs largely being met (Garland 2002:68). It can safely be ascertained that one of the most important responsibilities of parents is to guide their children into the building of relationships. Relationships are the key to further involvement and ministry of any person. Jesus is our perfect example and in the Gospels is ample evidence of the manner in which He taught. Krallmann (1992:13) concludes the following:

> ...in his discipling of the Twelve the Master attached eminent importance to association, i.e. companionship, the cultivation of close relational ties.

> On the basis of such with-ness he generated a dynamic process of life-transference which was meant to foster wholistic [sic] maturity....

The Scriptures reveal God's desire for families and one of these desires has to do with relationships. Strommen and Hardel (2000:15) argue that the Scriptures do not focus on the family as a collective unit but has more to do with relationships established between parents and children. They further state that strong, life-shaping families need to build and maintain two key relationships; strong family relationships and a relationship with God (p.16). Teaching Strategies (2006:138) argues that "children's development flourishes when they have close, supportive and trusting relationships with the adults in their lives." Parents are key role players in the establishing of these relationships. They need to seek ways and means to develop and establish these essential relationships.

There are numerous ways in which parents can create opportunities to build relationships with their children. One of the main ingredients of a relationship is that of communication. Fairchild (1964:125-126) argues that our very presence in a family means that we are forced to communicate with each other. Both the spoken word and unspoken behaviour sends messages to other members in the family. Being cut off from all communication actually means that we cannot be a person for God made us to relate to one another. Communication in the family needs to be honest and meaningful which will establish a bond of trust among all members (p.128). Parents have the ability to create an environment in which children can feel secure and accepted. Parents should work to create a high quality of communication strategies. Parents also need to know how to really love their children and the child needs to experience this love in a very practical way (Campbell 1992:14). Some ways in which strong and loving relationships are established include the following: playing together, eating together as a family, worshipping as a family and working together whilst focussing to concentrate all energy and also in suffering together. Suffering together, for example, shares dangers and anxieties which life forces upon families and this unites and builds strong relationships (Fairchild 1964:127).

Children need to feel that parents are involved in their lives without constantly dictating. Gurney (2007:117) mentions that parents should also engage in real life issues with their children. In other words, they should become involved in the child's life. It is only through a relationship of love and trust that this can happen effectively.

The gap between parent and child is becoming greater and children speak a different language than what parents do. Living close to the child and creating space for the child to confide in the parent through a loving relationship, the parent may well understand the child better and be able to contribute positively towards the need (McDowell and Hostetler 1998:8-11).

4.2 Nurture

Children born into a family are helpless and are dependant upon the parents for their care. Nurture, by definition, means to provide for children's physical and emotional needs and protection (O'Donovan 1992:288). It also involves the development of a sense of identity, who they are in Christ and that grace, mercy and salvation are undeserved gifts from God through Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Parents have the responsibility to provide nurture to their children. In some sense the parents have to be a buffer between the child and the world to protect the child from abuse and to provide for any need the child may have. These needs also differ from age to age and in many cases, from culture to culture as well.

Children in the first world, for example, seem to expect more from their parents than what they actually need for sound development. Parents become confused and perplexed to find some sort of balance in what is really needed and giving too much. Parents seek guidance from neighbours and from the many books available and more than often the information given is not what is needed at that particular stage (Campbell 1992:9). Parents can be sure in their own minds about what is right and what is wrong and in this sense they can know when to give and when to stop. Experience will guide the parents into dealing with the negative influences that seek to destroy the family in its entirety (Fairchild 1964:107). Parents should not always expect the worst or be driven by anxieties or fear. God has given His Spirit to guide and assist parents in their task to nurture their children. Paul mentions in his letter to Timothy that "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Included in the nurture process of children is the forming of a sense of identity within the child. God made all children different with specific gifts and talents (Proverbs 22:6). In some sense this often results in difficulties for parents, especially those who have more than one child to nurture. Also, children within one family are born at different times. What was important yesterday might not be so today. The family and

the community is ever changing and developing. McDowell and Hostetler (1998:8) states that modern societies are undergoing the fastest and most threatening cultural changes in human history and these changes are transforming every area of life, including that within families. Through deep love and care the parents may well be successful in their parenting tasks despite the differences, failures and mistakes made (Collins 2007:588).

Through nurture the parents demonstrate to the child what love, care and service is all about. This in turn will give the child a sense of identity, who he/she is; strengths, abilities, limitations and potential (Fairchild 1964:108). The child can know that he is valuable irrespective of failures or mistakes. Also, by demonstrating these things to children, the parents are laying the foundation for them to share the gospel with the child and to lead them in the process of salvation and discipleship (p.110).

4.3   Development of conscience

No one is born with a trained sense of conscience per se. Conscience must be developed through relationships with others. Strommen and Hardel (2000:35) add that parents should become more intentional in what they do or do not do as a family. This means that the focus should be on the things that are positive and constructive rather than on that which is not. Within this small community of a family, relationships resulting in Godly nurture of the child provides the foundation for children to develop inner controls that will go with them where ever they may go. Boyatzis and Janicki (2003:252) argue that "parents establish religious capital for their children upon which children's religious beliefs and attitudes may grow..."

The growing of conscience in children occurs throughout their development. At first it is directly linked to what the parents approve or disapprove of. In other words, something is good if the parents agree on it and it is bad if parents disagree (Fairchild 1964:112). Later they can decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.   It can be assumed that discipline is related to the growth of conscience. It is an essential gift the parent may give the child. Sadly, even here, much confusion exists in what discipline is and what it is not. Campbell (1992:9-10) argues that many parents believe discipline, in the form of punishment, is the only way to relate to or treat the child. Parents need to know that even through discipline the child may experience that they are loved unconditionally. Campbell also argues that discipline is more than mere punishment and expresses the following definition;

22

> Discipline is training a child in mind and character to enable him to become a self-controlled, constructive member of society (p.88).

Parents are responsible to provide the environment in which the child may grow in conscience. Fairchild (1964:113) mentions that a good conscience develops when parents seek to honour the needs of their children for both discipline and companionship. The way parents react to different issues which are posed upon the family will necessarily provide the direction in which the child will react in similar situations. The child will learn about boundaries, restrictions and guidance within these experiences. Children more than often follow the example of their parents and will necessarily look to parents to develop a good conscience (pp.114-115). One cannot also forget that God is constantly at work in children's lives and ever present to form a good conscience (Acts 2:39). The Spirit is the one who teaches us and guides us in the whole truth (John 14-16). Paul states;

> Do not be conformed to this world-this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs. But be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind-by its new ideals and its new attitude-so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you] (Romans 12:2, Amplified Bible).

The child's conscience must be constantly tutored by Jesus Christ (p.112). Parents know that their authority is limited for at a stage the child will leave the comfort and protection of home. That which he has been taught and exampled by parents will remain, by God's grace, in their lives.

4.4 System of values

No person can live without some form of value system in their lives. There has to be some commitment to some form of values; whether it is according to the government's system or that of society, democracy or the social sciences. Campbell (1992:16) argues that much of a child's time is under the control and influence of others. The world has much to offer, and in most cases, the values presented by the world are not credible to build and strengthen a child's foundation. A child will cling to anything if they are not guided and assisted in the formation of a sound and biblical value system. Fairchild (1964:17) refers to what Martin Luther had said: "Whatever, then, thy heart clings to...and relies upon, that is properly thy God". Fairchild proceeds and states the following in relation to the formation of values in one's life:

> Thus we are called to see life and our own decisions under the impact of what Christ said, what he did, and in the light of his presence in the fellowship of faith today.

The point of departure for parents today in their responsibility of creating the environment for values within the family is that they need to live according to sound and biblical values. Parents are responsible to set the tone and establish the atmosphere of love, trust and security within the family and home (Strommen and Hardel 2000:37). The whole issue of discipline comes to mind here. The guidance, direction and training the parent gives on daily matters will result in some form of value system within the child. This is also true in that what the bible teaches.

A strong relationship between parents and children will necessarily result in better understanding and trust is that what is shared. The parent can, through regular sharing and direction from the Scriptures, teach children biblical values in what God expects from them when they move outside the home environment. An example would be that God expects from us that we should live holy lives (1 Peter 1:16). Another is that God calls us to live a life worthy of the calling that we have received (Ephesians 4:1). Garland (2002:70) mentions that families, according to a social systems perspective, have what is termed shared beliefs, values and practices. Through constant sharing these beliefs, values and practices will become the building blocks that will form the child's character. So when the child is confronted with what the world has to offer outside the home, they can rely on what they have been taught during the times of sharing with their parents.

It is vital to also mention something concerning tolerance. The age old meaning of tolerance has been replaced by what McDowell and Hostetler (1998:17-19) term as the 'new tolerance'. New tolerance holds that all people are created equal so the next logical step is that everybody's system of beliefs, values and practices are equal and should be respected and praised. They refer to what Thomas A. Helmbock mentioned in that "...There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative." This type of reasoning is, as the authors put it, unbiblical and lowers the authority of the Scriptures to that of man. Parents are responsible to enlighten their children in this regard and direct them to the truth and values as contained in the Scriptures and which are good and acceptable as opposed to that which is presented by this 'new tolerance'.

4.5 Worship

It is argued that family worship is one of the most misunderstood and ignored subjects by parents. The reasons are many but more than often it is said that parents do not know how to lead children into a time of worship. Others are aroused by guilt feelings for not doing it and yet others may feel that it is not their responsibility as it belongs to the church (Fairchild 1964:118). In Jewish culture, it was common practice for parents to involve their children in times of worship. In fact, God commanded that children should be involved so that they may understand and experience His plans for his people. Although the Scriptures do not give us much description about Jesus' childhood years, Krallmann (1992:19-23) discusses some aspects of this time in His life and the influence spiritual parenting had on the formative years of Jesus. It was in the home that Jesus was introduced to the Law, journeys to the Temple as instructed by the Law, spiritual education and also Jesus' introduction to a number of religious customs and festivities.

Although some of these practices are not common in modern day worship it does not change the fact that family worship is still just as essential. There are, however limitations of family worship and this has its origin from the mere fact that parents do not know how to go about it. Some parents do not have the skills to gather their family together for any length of time to worship. Others do not know where to turn for adequate material that they could use to assist them during times of worship. There is also the age old saying that parents find it very difficult to catch and hold the attention of their children especially if they have children of different ages with different needs. Some parents may even take worship to the other extreme. They argue that family worship is the way they as families experience God's grace thereby limiting God's visitation in their lives to times of worship. Fairchild (1964:119) argues further that "we must not expect of worship in the home that which may not happen." Family worship is not a time of education either. It can be argued that teachings from the Bible may lead a family to worship God but it should be understood that teachings are talks about God whilst worship is listening to God speaking to the family.

God is constantly working in our lives. Parents have the responsibility to lead their children into a life of worship before God. Parents must teach children that worship is to know, accept and live God's forgiveness in their lives and also God's working

through Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Parents need to involve their children frequently in a time of worship (Beisner nd.:11) and live out God's love and grace in their lives. God's desire is that all people should worship Him (Psalm 86). He pursues a love relationship with every person and every child. Through this relationship God reveals His plan and purpose and that He wants to accomplish His purpose this way. When parents live out this relationship by worshipping God in every way, the child comes to experience that even his life is special to God and that He desires to also achieve His plan through them in their daily lives (Blackaby and Willis 1990:57-58).

4.6 Mature faith

It is God's desire that all people come to experience His love for them and that through this love relationship He will achieve His purpose in their lives and in the world they live in (Blackaby and Willis 1990:57). Paul prayed for the Philippians that their "love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..." (Philippians 1:9). He also prays that "...you being rooted and established in love, may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." (Ephesians 3:18). Wood (1978:52) argues that the love of Christ is for the church as a united body as well as for those who trust in him as individuals. Since children have the need to trust in Christ they are also subject to experience this love of Christ.

Parents can introduce children to this love and also teach and lead their children into a life of discipline and service in God's kingdom. They need to lead from the front and create opportunities for their children to mature in their faith and in service. This does not mean that a child needs to be sent to a mission field to achieve this. Children are exposed to many negative and worldly issues on a daily basis and the parents need to explain and guide the child to enable them to assess and deal with these issues (Fairchild 1964:101-106). Fairchild mentions the following relating to this:

> Our present dilemma as parents is that we do not know this story or its implications for the basic experiences of life and for familiar fields of thought.

The 'story' he refers to is that of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith (p.102). Many parents do not know or understand even the basics of Christianity, much less of how to teach it to their children. Parents should first of all know the Person Jesus Christ

who gives meaning of God's life in and through theirs. For parents to do this they must test their own understanding of the Christian faith to be able to teach their children.

Although the family is not a classroom or formal place of study, it provides for many different opportunities for parents to teach their lead their children to mature faith in Christ. The way parents react to daily issues and the way they do things will result in the child to look at these in the light of God's providential care. Krallmann (1992:23) argues that:

> ...the spiritual parenting Jesus experienced during his formative years by means of association produced rich fruit in his later life. It helped mould him into a man of great love for God, his Word and communion with him...shaping him into a man of great love for people, fellowship and meaningful relationships.

Beisner (nd.:11) argues that children will embrace the faith in direct proportion to the extent that parents embrace theirs. The more the child sees the parents being true to the Word and that, which is good and acceptable, the more the child will act upon, grow and mature in their faith. Campbell (1992:138) also argues that children only attain raw facts and knowledge from church, Sunday school and even home but must learn to use what they receive effectively and accurately to become a mature person spiritually. Parents who share their faith on a daily basis is the best way and only if this sharing is of high quality and aimed at the particular age, level of development and abilities.

Chapter Five

Children in the greater community

In this chapter I would like to discuss what the effect could be in the greater church community when children experience salvation and discipleship in God-fearing families. One cannot merely claim specific results as the norm for all children coming from these families. Families are exposed to many different experiences, whether positive or negative.

5.1 Introduction

God has been on mission throughout history. It is also God who initiates this work and instead of doing it on His own He chose a more personal way; to involve His people to accomplish His purpose in the world (Blackaby and Willis 1990:55-56). God's mission is still the same today as it was thousands of years ago and includes the following; that His name be glorified, His kingdom be established and to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ (p.58). Jesus trained his disciples to carry on with the work he had started by discipling each generation and to lead men and women in the same steps to spiritual maturity (Hunneshagen 2002:4). God still does this in the same personal way and also desires to include the children in His purpose. Throughout the Scriptures God involved children in His purpose and plans.

5.2 A biblical perspective

The Scriptures tells us that God approached Abram and he was to take his own people and his father's household to a place the He would show him. God promised that He would make him a great nation, bless him and through his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12-22). God was true to His promise and later Isaac was born and God proceeded to accomplish His purpose through Isaac involving him at a very young age. Isaac's willingness and obedience was the beginning of a great nation.

Later God's people found themselves in slavery in Egypt. God approached His people and even here God chose to include the children in His plan of salvation for them (Exodus 12). The children experienced God's work first-hand. The parents were to continuously remind them of what had happened and why it happened.

Feasts were also introduced for this reason. God's deliverance was to further mould his people into the nation that He desired. He chose to do this through the children.

Israel journeyed through the desert and God again approached His people by leading and guiding them. Their disobedience resulted in only their children inheriting the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:39). Kalland (1992:28) confirms that only the children who were then helpless and uninformed were to acquire the land promised to Israel. The older faithless generation were condemned to return to the desert. Later the same older generation was instructed to teach their children His laws and creeds (6:4-9). God's desire was that the children who entered the land were to be instructed in His ways. The children were constantly involved and experienced the way God moved with His people (11:5). People like Daniel and his friends as well as Samuel and David could understand and obey God in their quest because of teaching and instruction at an early age.

Throughout these ventures God was on mission with His people. They were to be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6). In 1 Peter God again reminds His people what His desire is (1 Peter 2:9) which include the children for "the promise is for you and your children...." (Acts 2:39).

5.3 Jesus' method

5.3.1 Jesus' childhood

Krallmann (1992:19-41) focuses on some very important issues which Jesus was exposed to in his childhood years and which had a major effect on his ministry. His parent's focus was to build character and mould Him into the person He was to become. He could teach with authority (Matthew 7:29) and was called 'Rabbi' by the people (John 1:38).

5.3.1.1 Spiritual parenting

Jesus was born into a God-fearing family. Both His father and mother obeyed God's direction and purpose for their lives (Matthew 1:24, Luke 1:38). Growing up in close association with His father and mother certainly had a very positive influence during his formative years. He received spiritual education from a very young age. It was also his parents who introduced him to religious customs and the various festivities of the time. The spiritual parenting from an early age helped to mould Him into a man

with love for God, the Word and His love for the people of His time (Krallmann 1992:19-23).

5.3.1.2   Vocational apprenticing

It was not only spiritual parenting that contributed to Jesus' character formation but also the close relation He had with his father, Joseph and his guidance in practical skills in His life. By being involved in manual labour He could closely identify Himself with the people of His time. Krallmann (1992:27) argues that the environment of the carpentry shop was an excellent place of preparation where Jesus learned lessons of great value that surfaced during His earthly ministry. He refers to skills like human nature, working relations, observational skills, strategic thinking and managerial skills (p.28).

5.3.2   Jesus' ministry

These skills Jesus learned during His formative years with his parents gave him the background which He needed to apply to His own ministry.   Jesus knew the importance of close relations and discipleship so He engaged upon a method which resulted in the planting of the early church. He called a few to be with Him (Mark 3:14) and discipled them.   Discipling these few meant in close relation to Him; personal encounter and close relationships.   He proceeded to involve them in His ministry to prepare them for their own ministry (Yousaf 2006:90). He left an example for His servant people to follow (John 13:15).   During an investigation and further studies in the teaching methods displayed by Jesus, Collinson (2005:240-242) formulates six components in the discipleship process which includes the following:

Relational-the entering into a close loving relationship

Intentional-aimed at a specific outcome

Informal-more life-related teaching

Communal-inclusion into a larger, nurturing community

Reciprocal-everyone has a contribution to make

Centrifugal-a learning process resulting in further involvement and ministry

Children should experience salvation and discipleship within the family at an early age if they were to proceed and become involved in the greater church community.

Parents could apply the mentioned components in their endeavour to disciple their children to ultimately become part of the centrifugal process both when young and later in life. Jesus used this method and so should modern parents. Jesus did not hesitate to include the children in His ministry on different occasions. For example, when parents brought their children to Jesus for Him to bless, His disciples rebuked them. Jesus said that the children should come to Him (Matthew 19:14). Although far from innocent, children are more sensitive to the supernatural world and they find it easier to see God's hand at work in His creation as do adults (Tasker 1961:185).

5.4 The modern community

God's mission has not changed and He is still on mission today with the same purpose in mind: to glorify His name, establish His kingdom and reconcile all people to Him (Blackaby and Willis 1990:58). Jesus gives specific instruction in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 whereby disciples are to be made of all nations and they are to be taught everything that He had commanded. Within these nations are children who are also in dire need of salvation and discipleship. Children are in desperate need of a relationship with God and His loving care for them (Campbell 1992:14). Many children in modern Christian families express the same needs. Modern parents are becoming more confused and discouraged in their child-rearing efforts mostly due to them not understanding the fast changing climate children find themselves in.

5.4.1 Contextualization

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that even though many parents do have the right attitude and even honest in their attempts, they still fail miserably. Parents become emotionally, physically and spiritually drained and it becomes more and more difficult to nurture and teach their children (Campbell 1992:14). Krallmann (1992:166-178) refers to the concept 'contextualization' with the meaning of rendering relevant, meaningful and acceptable information to the receptor culture. In the case of children, it is accepted that they live in a different world as do parents. They have specific needs and desires which need to be met. They might even speak the same language but they attach different meaning to it and parents are excluded from their experiences (McDowell and Hostetler 1998:9). The result is confusion, stress, misunderstanding and often resentment.

Parents should take time and effort to better understand the life experiences of their children and bring the message and teaching into context with these experiences. The dignity of the child should also always be considered (Krallmann 1992:167). Maybe the one important question that parents need to ask is: "What would the Lord Jesus do, if he were in this specific cultural context?" The Gospels gives important information on the way Jesus contextualized the message to reach the hearts of the people. Krallmann proceeds to argue that:

> Contextualization of Biblical content consists of more than mere intellectual activity,[sic] it amounts to fabricating with God's help the very key that will unlock people's hearts for the reception of divine truth.

Children need to understand and experience the Word in their everyday experiences that they are faced with. They need to know, trust God and keep His commands (Psalm 78:5-7) in their specific world environment.

5.4.2 Apologetics

The Scriptures teaches that all should be in a position to give clear reasons for the hope which one has and keeping a clear conscience at all times (1 Peter 3:15-16). In this modern age people are exposed to many different social issues and even more so, different religious issues. Woods (2008:iv) mentions that there are many fundamental questions which are constantly being asked. Children are exposed to these as much as parents are. These questions include the following: Where does man come from, what is the purpose of it all, is there an intelligent Designer, Being or Beings and issues like salvation, redemption and the afterlife?

There is also the ever increasing issue of the numerous different religions in the world. Religion is not confined to any specific region or culture anymore. Previously being an Irish meant being Catholic. Also, living in Africa meant being African Traditional. This is not the case anymore. Woods (2008:iv) further argues that the television, internet and increased proselytizing have resulted in religion going global. The religious landscape is very cluttered, complex and is ever-changing. Children are exposed to this in their everyday life. In the same school you will find children from many different religious backgrounds. Children need to be prepared to give clear reasons for their faith.

5.4.3 Faith community

Fairchild (1964:179-195) discusses a few skills which could assist parents in guiding their children. Firstly he mentions that of decision making. He argues that it is the key to Christian nurture in the family and relevant to the most practical aspects of family life. Children should be guided into making good, relevant decisions specifically in relation to their faith. If they are firmly grounded in the Christian faith and taught to defend their position it will help them to focus. Secondly, he mentions that of commitment. Commitment involves total involvement in what one believes and lives for. When a child is discipled into the art of decision making the child will find liberty in that decision. Deciding to commit his life to Christ will result in a life of obedience and will necessarily involve others in their lives since we are all part of a greater community.

The other issue Fairchild (1964:189) touches on is that of guidance in faith. Being part of a greater community means that we all need to contribute to this community. We do not live for ourselves. Children are part of the family community but at the same time part of the community at school or in town. It also means that they are part of the greater church community. Here they can experience love, worship, fellowship and prayer. He mentions that biblical ethics and that of decision making are in the individual conscience but must circle out into the covenant community. Wiebe (1993:ch.6) argues that the family is God's 'first curriculum', the first community of faith. This is where children should experience salvation, discipleship and holy living. Then there is the church community where children should be taken up in fellowship and where their lives could further be moulded and shaped. Gurney (2007:92) mentions the following:

> Our call as Christians is to be integrated into the Body in order to make a difference for the Kingdom and the glory of the Lord.

Gurney further argues that the modern Church is faced with a huge challenge in that many parents do not attend church or even take their own children to church (p.96). Gurney concludes that there should be guidance and direction to parents in this regard which should come from the Church. The Church has the responsibility to purposefully involve the parents in their child-rearing efforts where necessary for the church is one Body in Christ (Ephesians 4).

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In this chapter I will summarize the findings of the research and will relate them to the stated aims and objectives and make recommendations on the research findings.

6.1   Summary of the research findings

The research revealed the following.

The salvation and discipleship of children first and foremost belongs within the specific environment of the family. Many parents are, however, not involved in the salvation and discipleship process of their children within the family. Parents are honest in their endeavours but more than often lack the necessary knowledge and resources. Parents are more than often confused, discouraged and stressed in their child-rearing efforts. The result is that they neglect this vital role in their children's lives and shift the responsibility to someone else.

The Scriptures give certain guidance on what God's desire is for the children of today within families. The setting and culture has changed dramatically but the purpose remains the same. Parents need to perceive children the way God does. This will guide parents into accepting their responsibilities towards their children. Modern families are also exposed to many different influences, both external and internal, and they react differently to these influences. Families are not static in their development but are exposed to constant change. It is within this setting that parents need to involve themselves in the lives and needs of their children to be able to give the necessary guidance.

Children also grow up a family environment under the leadership of the parents. The parent's attitudes, reactions and feelings are all contributing factors to the moulding and character building of the children. Parents have important responsibilities toward their children. These responsibilities should be addressed holistically. Through the building of relationships the parents have the responsibility to guide their children into a loving relationship with God and to further assist them in discipleship for them to live mature spiritual lives and to further be involved in God's purpose for the world through them as children.

6.2   The relationship between the research findings and the aims and objectives of the research

The research confirmed that there are dynamics within families and that each family reacts to experiences differently. It is within this specific family environment that children should experience salvation and discipleship. It also confirms that parents should build relationships with their children and through this relationship they are responsible to lead and guide their children into a loving relationship with God and further disciple them to mature spiritually and to live out their spirituality within the greater church community and beyond. To achieve this God gives guidance through the Scriptures and the church can also be involved to assist in this process.

6.3   Recommendations on the research findings

I would like to recommend the following:

Parents should accept their God given responsibility to lead their children into a loving relationship with God and further disciple them to reach spiritual maturity. The church could be the institution that should guide and teach parents in this regard.

Parents need to spend more time and effort building relationships with their children to gain their trust and respect. Children should not only hear but experience that they are loved by their parents. Parents also need to get to know their children's needs and dreams in order for them to better understand their children to be able to bring whatever they teach into context with the child's specific life environment. This obviously places a great responsibility on parents to also deepen their relationship with God.

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