

In The Potter's House.

III – Eadie and the boys (God's ties)

III – Wanja coming to faith

Mark 19¹³ *People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*

At another place the disciples asked a question and Jesus used a little child to help them understand his answer, he said -

Matt 18¹ *At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³ And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. ⁶ But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*

Sometimes we dismiss the faith of little children saying "They're too young to understand anything," and so we scoff at their desire to be saved, but the faith of little children is a precious thing to God, and he has called us to bring them to him. So much so that in these 2 instances he used their faith to teach adults what faith is all

about! Indeed one of the richest gospel field is in the 4 – 14 window - children between the ages of 4 and 14 yrs.

What I wish to do today is show you some of the different ways the bible gives us on how to create a hunger for God in a child, how to sustain their faith, and even how to cause it to grow. 7 keys that we often forget, but that are simple keys towards this end. Many of my thoughts come from a book by Catherine Stonehouse I read a year ago called "[Joining Children On The Spiritual Journey](#)"

Key 1 – Everyday Life around the home : The first, and the most important way is everyday life around the home! This is the primary place where children are molded, their values are shaped, their personality and temperament is set.

Deut 6¹ *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

The idea here was to use every opportunity, every incident in the day, every conversation, to teach the children about God. But before they could do this, notice there were 2 things Moses commanded the parents (i) He first called them into a living, loving relationship with God (ii) he required them to FIRST have

these commands upon their hearts BEFORE they tried impressing them on their children's hearts. Only after we have affirmed our faith in God, entered into a loving relationship with him and internalized God's laws are we ready to teach children.

Our Kids love TV cartoons, but if you sit down and watch these cartoons with them, you'll see there are powerful negative values being taught. On Friday we took our children to see "Mulan", and if you have watched any of the more recent Walt Disney's, there are 3 central themes of all recent Walt Disney's – *The Little Mermaid*, *Pocahontus*, etc **First** is defiance of parents, **second** is they always have the words "follow your heart", in other words do what YOU think is right, never mind what your parents or others who advice you say, and **third** there is always a romance thrown in, kisses, hugging, the works, which puts a lot of pressure on children to do likewise. And so after the film we asked the kids to pick out all the times in the film that *Mulan* lied and defied her parents authority, and all the times the producer cheated us – like *Mulan* fighting off men who were 3 times her size.

So what opportunities during the day do you take to help the children grow? Do you discuss the events of their day in the light of God's word, are you actively shaping their worldview so that they can see things from god's perspective?

Key 2 : Symbols – The first commandment strictly forbids the worship of idols. There was no place for idols, but there was a place for rich sensory symbols. The instructions for making the Tabernacle, which was a symbol of God's presence with Israel, were very elaborate. The tent of meeting, the Rod of Moses, the Urim and Thummim, the bronze snake God commanded should be made to bring healing to those who had been bitten by snakes when God punished the Israelites in Numbers 21:8.

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the promised land, they took 12 stones and set them up at their camp at Gilgal (Jos 4 :1-8). Joshua explained to the people *Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."*

We are afraid of the symbols because when people don't have a living faith, they quickly worship the symbol itself. But the O.T. faith is rich of symbols and color.

So what symbols do you have around your life? In actual fact, most of us DO have symbols around us - symbols of wealth, or symbols of material security, instead of symbols of faith.

Key 3 – Stories : All children LOVE a well told story! And not just once, a good story is worth retelling over and over again. Stories are a powerful way to teach children by. Look at

Ex 10¹ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them ² that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD."*

Ex 12²⁴ *"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. ²⁵ When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. ²⁶ And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' ²⁷ then*

tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'"

God was creating stories in the life of the community so that they could be retold to the children. At the **Passover dinner**, the Jews have a tradition where the youngest member or child at the table asks the question "What does this mean?", which then gives the oldest male at the table the chance to re-tell the story of God's deliverance!

We need to tell our children Bible stories of the people of God, but they also need to hear contemporary stories of God at work today. Too often however, they are excluded from the places these modern stories are told – the Ekklesia groups, the Sunday service testimonies, the fellowship meetings. Age related teaching is good, but children need to hear adult, contemporary stories of faith too.

There are several ways we can share such stories with our children

1. **Books** - *Guidepost*
 - *The Book For Children (age 2 – 7)*
 - *The Children's Bible Illustrated by Jose Montero*
 - *The simplified Living Bible Text (age 7 – 13)*
 - *The Children's version of Operation World*
2. **Dinner table stories** as you invite guests, missionaries, overnight visitors, etc.
3. **Your** own stories of faith – what God has done in your life.
4. **Make-up stories** with moral content.

So what stories are your children listening to? Do any of these build up their faith?

Key 4 – Rituals : As a part of the way of life, God prescribed certain rituals to keep faith alive. Many of these were constructed

around the temple, but there were community rituals and family rituals too. On the holy days, the people were to do certain things in a certain way. At Passover in Ex 12:8, the people were instructed by God *That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire -- head, legs and inner parts. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.*

As a family, we have a Sabbath candlelight meal together every Friday, before the sun goes down. We're trying to build some rituals into this as a family tradition. The oldest as a sign of her honored position, lights the candle, mummy leads the singing, I read a scripture, the youngest prays, the dinner conversation is on what we appreciated most about each other that week, we share a sweet each, and the middle child blows out the candle, then we play one children's game before they sleep at 8:00 pm. Recently we have begun to break bread together as brothers and sisters in Christ. The kids love it!

Rituals around Christmas, communion, Easter, rituals around days of prayer, and around family fasting. Faith rituals around birthdays and around grandparents. Rituals to remember and honor the faith of family believers who have gone to be with the Lord. These do not need to be elaborate, boring rituals, but simple, vibrant, fun rituals that will add to the children's faith.

So what faith rituals do you have in your home?

Key 5 – Annual Feasts : In Deut16 Moses gave 3 important annual feasts. Each of these were to be times of rejoicing and celebrating God's goodness. Take the feast of Booths for example,

this was a 7 day feast to celebrate the harvest, where the people lived in the open under booths made of tree branches. The people would come together waving branches, glorifying God. Can you imagine how much fun this must have been for children? Tangible, sensory experiences that communicated awe, wonder and a common identity.

Our Easter Family Camping trip to Lake Naivasha was a first attempt to recreate the feast of Booths around the resurrection. 20 families went out to Lake Naivasha and lived in tents for the 3 days of Easter, and thoroughly enjoyed it, but you should hear the children's version of it! The fun, the games, the tents, we even slaughtered 3 goats and the teenage boys helped their fathers do this, and in the process began to learn how to slaughter in the traditional way. One afternoon the teenagers went water skiing, another evening some of the 10 – 12 year olds went with their fathers fishing. There were lots of games for the kids, and discussions on parenting for the adults. This was our Feast of Booths, and we want to make it an annual Easter event.

So what feasts do you have to nurture your child's faith?

Key 6 – Songs : Have you noticed how fascinated the little children often are when we gather together and worship? In fact, they spend much of their time looking at the adults dance, looking into our faces to see the radiance and joy there, looking in awe when we raise our hands and tears stream down our faces. Songs have always been a way of teaching, the book of Psalms is a book of songs – it supposed to be sung, not read.

There are 2 types of songs children need to sing – first is of-course children's songs that they can understand. Kid's tapes, Sunday School, musicals – these are good.

But secondly - in our African communities, songs had a very important place – to teach and to celebrate important events. Today, professional music has taken over, has robbed our communities of their songs – people no longer sing, they listen to professional music. The only place we have left to sing our hearts out is in the church, and in many churches even this sounds like a dirge. By and large, community singing has been given over to the church - it is a big trust. But what do we adults do, we leave out the children, so that they can go and sing their simple children's songs.

Turn in your Bibles to Ps 120 – see how Ps 120 – 134 are titled? They are songs of ascents – these were the songs the people would sing as they approached Mt Zion, climbing up to Jerusalem, on their way to present themselves before the Lord in the Temple. The Kids would be right there, on their fathers shoulders howling their heads off in unison.

So, what songs are your children singing?

Key 7 – The Community Of Faith : This then brings us to the last Key – The Community of Faith. Everything we have said so far, cannot be done in isolation by individual families, it needs to be done “as the people of God”, in community, and Kids are a part of it. Take for example II Chron 20:1–28, when King Jehoshaphat heard that a huge army was coming to attack him, Jehoshaphat called a fast and in great fear sought God's help. Vs 13 says

¹³ All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. ¹⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jehaziel as he stood in the assembly. ¹⁵ He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: `Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Do

not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'"

¹⁸ Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.

Imagine the **tension** and **fear** in the air, and then the **hope** when the prophet spoke. Imagine the **anxiety** and **waiting** as the men went out to battle the next morning, and then the sense of **rejoicing** and **jubilantion** when they heard about the deliverance. The children were there, they saw, they heard and they participated in God's deliverance. What a powerful lesson on trusting in God.

Faith cannot be sustained in isolation, even as a family, it needs community around it. The children need to see other children who believe what they believe, they need other uncles and aunts who believe like Mom and Dad do, they need teens to look up to, grandparents in the faith, heroes and leaders, they need community. It has been said that ***“Religion, but not faith, can be taught. Faith must be inspired within a community.”***

So what community of faith do you surround your children with? Other families, church picnics, Sunday service, visitors, peer group meetings?

Conclusion : These then are 7 of the keys God has given us to help nurture the faith of our children. Be creative as a parent and use these keys for then our little ones will be richly fed in the Lord!