

G P S

For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Stewardship for Children

We never stop being someone's child. There are those times, especially when we're young, that we wish we could stop—and those times, when our parents are gone, that we wish we could recover that family closeness. Our life as a child can be divided into two periods—those years we are under our parents' direct control, and those years when we are independent.

Under parental care

The apostle Paul commands children to “obey” their parents (Eph 6:1-4). Peter says to “submit” to one's elders (1 Pet 5:5). Just as a father has a stewardship before God for leadership, and a mother has a stewardship for submission, the child has a stewardship for obedience. All three roles are needed to complete our dominion mandate in the dispensation in which we live.

First, your parents brought you into the world. Life begins at conception and that was caused by a father and a mother. You owe your very life to these people and God has placed you in their care by His providence. Elisabeth Elliot wrote, “What we are is a gift, and, like other gifts, chosen by God alone. We are not presented with an array of options: What would you like to be? How tall? What color? What temperament would you prefer? Which parents would you choose as forebears?” Second, they nurtured you through the formative years and made you what you are: Your smile, your personality, your very voice inflection.

Third, they prepared you for life including guiding you to Christ, teaching you basic skills needed for survival, and helping you make good decisions that would be a help and not a hinderance in life. Fourth, they taught you obedience. The command for obedience is grounded in the fifth commandment

(Eph 6:2, Exod 20:12). Being “disobedient to parents” is listed among the worst sins in the Bible (Rom 1:30; 2 Tim 3:2). A younger child needs gentle force to assure this obedience, and an older child should see obedience as his/her part of submission that we all have to Christ as our Head (Eph 5:21-6:4).

Independent of parental care

In the Bible, children are under their parents' care until they leave to start their own home in marriage (Gen 2:24). Yet, the 5th commandment to honor parents never ends as long as our parents are alive.

First, your parents guide you during your single years. You may be at home, in school, or already working a job. The decisions you make during these years take wisdom beyond what you have experienced, and that is where mother and father come in. They have been there and done that. Second, you must seek their guidance in choosing a life's mate. Yes, this is ultimately your choice but, again, they have been there and you haven't. There is no greater decision after salvation than marrying someone. Too many times singles make this choice for all the wrong reasons.

Third, you will live with your parents' influence until they die. Don't waste this time. There are good examples from your parents; mimic those and carry on that heritage. There are poor examples from your parents; reclaim those and let them be for good. I mean, you see some things that you don't want to repeat so those things become good poor examples. By learning from them you reclaim what they should have been. Fourth, eventually you will switch places with your parents and care for them as they cared for you. This is honorable. After they are gone you will pass on the legacy to their grandchildren. This is honorable.

The Shrinking Ministry

This is the second part (of three) of an article I wrote last year and didn't print. I am printing it here because we continue to have a "shrinking ministry," i.e., fewer pastors and workers in our churches and fewer churches as well as many older churches closing their doors for good. In part one I listed various reasons that have been given by good men. In this second part I will add a few of my own reasons, and then in part three add some of my own thoughts for solutions. Here is part two.

What are some reasons? Our own reasons come out of our own experience. What is striking or obvious to one may not be to someone else. Here are a few reasons that I have observed in my own ministry. 1) The cost of college or seminary education is an obvious deterrent to ministry but it also is unavoidable in the 21st century. Nevertheless, if a student leaves his education years with huge debt, it is very difficult or impossible to live on a minister's salary, especially as a new or young pastor. Associate positions are even more difficult to afford. 2) The rise of para-church (and related) ministries has pulled many of our potential ministers away from local church work to greener grass in other places and types of ministry. We seldom get these workers back into our local church ministries. 3) I also think that the dissolving of our denominational names and the weakening of our fellowship and associational ties causes many of our men to be pulled away from our fellowshiping churches. As a young man myself I bristled at the feeling of being a cog in a fellowship machine. Then I realized that Sunday schools, youth groups, youth camps, Bible colleges, seminaries, mission agencies, church planters, all complete a necessary cycle for keeping like-minded ministry going. As these connections became looser, schools, churches, and mission agencies have suffered. 4) I agree that the Covid years hurt churches and schools. The necessity of live-streaming and zooming has resulted in less in-church attendance and in-class enrollment. Our services and schools may be available to people and students all over the world (and praise the Lord for it!) but those good men are not as available to our churches or mission boards as they once were. 5) Woodrow Kroll has a chapter called "WAGAPS School Teachers." That stands for "We're As Good As Public Schools." He even says, "In his effort to provide a superior education, the WAGAPS Christian school

teacher drives his students as far from life-time ministry as possible." Kroll's point is that many times our schools (and I would add our churches) have tried so hard to keep up with the cultural Joneses that we have unwittingly pushed our young people away from ministry which appears less acceptable and toward careers that are more financially stable. 6) Pastors, teachers, and church parents have not raised up a generation for ministry as they once did. Youth groups, camps, Christian schools are just not producing the same ministry mindset.

In addition to these, our own children, in our church families, are becoming discouraged toward ministry; our associates and pastoral staff often do not follow through into further pastoral ministry; we have often criticized our own cause to the point that young men do not want our conservative churches and ministry; and we may have pushed an "upward mobility" mindset to the point that young people either cannot or will not "consider the cost" of ministry. I only add my own reasons for a shrinking ministry to the observations of others. (To be continued)

Statistics

The Barna Research Center, in a series titled, "The Resilient Pastor Initiative," compared the satisfaction of pastors in 2015 with those in 2022. In a recent article, "A Rapid Decline in Pastoral Security" (3/15/23), Barna gave these reasons for pastoral decline: € The number of pastors who are feeling burnt out, lonely or unwell is on the rise, and this is especially true among young pastors. € The end of the pandemic decline has not seen a return to pre-pandemic levels. € Only 35% of pastors under 45 say they are satisfied in the ministry. € During these years the percentage of pastors who were "confident in their calling" also dropped from 66% to 35%. € 25% say they have "lost confidence" in their calling since they began ministry. The article concludes, "Pastors aren't just broadly less happy with their work than they used to be, they may also be less sure of where they're supposed to be." Accessed and summarized 6/21/23.

Note: I realize that research groups such as Barna or Pew paint with a very broad brush. We would expect our conservative pastors to be more confident and stable in their calling to ministry. The statistics do show, however, dangers in current ministry culture.