

“Own your own faith...”

BY DAVID POSEY

We often stress the importance of our children owning their own faith. “God has no grandchildren,” we say, and it’s true. A child’s faith can never be second-hand; it must be his own.

This is very real to me because I’m a product of faithful parents. I believe I am here because of what they taught me and, even more, what they exemplified in their lives. Before my father started preaching, he worked very hard as a carpenter. He built some of the houses you see in the Newport Beach area that sit on the side of the hill. Those houses have survived several mudslides; he was adamant about building those houses to last.

My father’s favorite text was I Kings 7:22. Speaking of the final touch that Hiram of Tyre put on the pillars in the temple, the text says, “and on the tops of the pillars was lily-work; and thus the pillars were finished.” Those pillars were 35 feet high. It was very difficult to see the lily-work, if you could see it at all. Hiram could easily have bypassed that little detail. But he didn’t. Whether anyone else in the world saw that detail, he knew God saw it.

My father was adamant about not only doing it right, but doing it *well*; but not only doing it well, doing it with a flourish. But not only doing it with a flourish but doing it for the glory of God.

He brought that attitude to his preaching as well. He wasn’t educated; he wasn’t smooth in speech; he didn’t have fancy PowerPoint charts. But he believed what he was preaching with all his heart, and he preached it for the glory of God.

My mom’s faith, too, was as solid and consistent as it could be. She was the epitome of I Peter 3:1-6, the “gentle and quiet spirit.” It isn’t always easy being a preacher’s wife, but I never saw her waver in her faith, no matter how she (or my dad) was treated by “the brethren.”

I can say the same about Christie’s parents. Both their Bibles are well-worn and it shows in their faith that shines in all they do.

So, we have huge shoes to fill. Except that’s not how it works. We have to have our own “shoes.” It would be great if I could ride into heaven in the shoes of our faithful parents, but, alas, “God has no grandchildren.”

Much of what I preach about, at least in the last 20 years or so, comes from knowing that most of the kids I knew growing up are no longer faithful. Some left the Lord when they got out of the home; some when they married a non-Christian; some when got divorced; some when they just got tired of being in the church — their love just grew cold.

If you want to know why their faith was weak — if there was any at all — look no further than their parents. The faith of the parents of the kids we grew up with — in hindsight — consisted primarily of showing up at services “at the appointed time.” They brought their Bibles but they were far from worn out from use. Bible classes were often just lectures by the preacher and the students were rarely challenged. If there was participation at all, there was a lot of opinion but little actual engagement with the text.

In some cases, the application of the text either went far beyond the context or was just ridiculous. For instance, Christie and I, early in our marriage, sat in a class in which the older adults spent 15-20 minutes discussing whether a Christian should ever go into a liquor store, even if only to buy a carton of milk. The solution — after much debate — was to make sure that the milk carton showed out of the top of the bag so no one would draw the wrong conclusion about why you were in the store.

Meanwhile, the kids would come to class unprepared because the parents would come to their classes unprepared. There was, apparently, very little interest in studying the Bible outside the church building.

To top it off, in many cases, marriages were in a constant state of dysfunction — proved by the fact that many divorced after the kids left home.

No wonder the faith of the children of these parents was less than stellar. Jesus’ life and teaching did not touch real life, but was confined to the church building — if that. In commenting on Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:1-4, Fred Buechner said this,

Children aren’t necessarily better than other people. Like the child in “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” they are just apt to be better at telling the difference between a phony and the real thing.

I think he has a point that all of us need to take to heart.