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"Start Small"

Sermon Series: *Mission Possible*, No. 3
Today's message is from Youth Pastor, Caitlin Gothay

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Proverbs 22:1-16

1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

2 Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.

3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

4 Humility and the fear of the Lord; bring wealth and honor and life.

5 In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them.

6 Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not turn from it.

7 The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.

8 He who sows injustice reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.

9 A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

10 Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.

11 He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for a friend.

12 The eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge, but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful.

13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!"

14 The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; the man who is under the Lord's wrath falls into it.

15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

16 He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.

There are pros and cons to being the third person to share a message in a sermon series. The benefits are having more time to prepare and having some ideas to bounce mine off of. The downside is that unless this group has lost a significant amount of the memory brain matter that Daryl referred to, I have to come up with something different from the first two messages.

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I am sure that many of you have heard pieces of my testimony before. I would like to share, as the other pastors did some meaningful things that contributed to my discipleship.

I grew up in the church and, much like Dwight and Daryl, if the doors were open, we were there. These statistics may be telling of which young people here may become pastors in their future.

I remember my family being very generous with our time in service to the Lord. My mom and dad served faithfully on church committees, sang in the choir, and helped in other ways.

My mom was usually the story-teller for VBS and then volunteered my dad which Bible character he would be. Since they typically included the whole congregation, even funerals and the events surrounding them were a meaningful part of my discipleship. There was a predictable pattern to how we honored those who had passed away.

I cannot remember a time when I did not look forward to being at the church. Except for the time my dad made me put on all my karate sparring gear as an object lesson about the armor of God for children's time.

Some other ways I remember being discipled as a young person in the church were through programs like Sunday school and VBS. Our VBS always had a puppet mascot and I will never forget the Can-Do Kangaroo who taught me Philippians 4:13. I also sang in the "Junior Choir" and attended a multi age youth group type after school program on Wednesdays through middle school.

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Our church did not have an official youth group, but when I was in high school I began attending a group at another church with some friends and became fully involved with whatever I could be. My youth pastor Mr. P was very much an example of incarnational ministry. Mr. and Mrs. P went above and beyond to love and disciple us teens even though they both had full-time jobs outside of the church. They often invited the youth to their home to swim, watch football, bake cookies or just hang out together.

A specifically meaningful experience was our annual trip to New York City to serve at a food distribution hub that served mostly the homeless population. This trip brought an extra challenge to us because the majority of those we interacted with did not speak English and we were expected to learn basic phrases to interact with the people on our own. The food pantry was based out of a church with Christian school that my youth Pastor worked at and was near the community he lived in when he was young. It was so special to watch him give back to the community he was raised in and be invited into that space to serve with him.

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Even though I did not think so at the time, the people who held me accountable to making good choices, having a good attitude, and trying my best were highly effective in my spiritual growth. Mrs. P was always telling us to "be positive and encouraging" when us teenage girls were being caddy and gossipy. I had leaders at my summer camp call me out when I was joking in a way that would lead to hurt feelings. And even as a young adult my college advisor met with
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me to tell me that even though my grades were good, he could tell I was not giving my best efforts and that was no longer an option if I wanted to be successful in ministry.

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As I got older, I was given very meaningful ways to serve in the church as well. In almost every circumstance, once I was too old to participate in a certain program I was helping lead it. Anywhere I could help I was happy to be given a job. I collected money at fundraiser meals with my dad. I prepared food for hoagie sales and spaghetti dinners. I helped plan, decorate for and lead Vacation Bible School. I was part of church committees as a teen and had a role in leading worship on Sundays. I was a leader for our youth group's local mission trip once I was too old to be a participant. I served at the camp I went to growing up as soon as I was old enough to. I even taught Bible classes at the camp while I was in college.

Being given opportunities as a middle, high school and college student to lead while being supported, taught and coached is definitely something that helped me get to where I am today spiritually and vocationally.

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Some things that were meaningful in my home life to my discipleship were listening to K-love in the car with my mom as we waited for the school bus, watching faith-based television, like touched by an angel or veggie tales and reading the Our Daily Bread devotions at dinner time. Every year at Christmas time one of my Christmas presents was to pick an animal from the Samaritan's Purse catalog to send to a family. Just the other day we received one of those catalogs in the mail and I was able to do the same thing with Maxwell. (Caitlin's son)

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The passage that was read gave a bit of a random prescription for a spiritually healthy life. A paraphrase of these might be…

Your character is more important than money.
Wisdom keeps you safe.
Humility brings life.
Stay away from wickedness.
Discipline and guide your children.
Be careful with your finances.
Act justly.
Be generous.
Resist poor humor.
Be pure and gracious.
Be faithful to God.
Don't be lazy.
Don't lie.
Don't cheat.
Be disciplined rather than foolish.
Do not be oppressive.

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These are all great and practical tips for a healthy spiritual life, but I am going to take a moment to focus on verse 6. It says, "Train up children in the way they should go, And when they are old they will not depart from it."

Disciple making is not only for adults to do for and with other adults. Contrary to the culture, Jesus placed value on children and confirmed their participation in His kingdom. Matthew records Jesus saying "...unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven". Luke records Jesus replying to an argument among His disciples saying "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me."

Long before Jesus had to step in to redirect Jewish thinking, God spoke through Moses to Israel with the instructions that Pastor Daryl spoke on a few weeks ago.

> *"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 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 doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*

God's intentions for Israel were ultimately for them to be a beacon of light, love, and hope to the other nations, but it was very clear that the training for that began at home, within the family. Young people had and still have the potential to learn about and do great things for God. God spoke directly to the prophet Jeremiah about how he was formed, known, and set apart even before his birth, and Jeremiah argued with God saying he was too young. Arguing with God never works out, and he very clearly never accepts the excuse of being too young.

Paul encouraged Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because of his youth, but to set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. I do not think that as a whole we give kids, teens, or young people the credit they are due in regard to their ability to be amazing leaders in the faith.

Even if you don't have children or teens or young adults still at home, this wisdom can be applied to discipling anyone in their faith. Many places in scripture refer to training, leading and teaching. The verbiage in Proverbs 22:6 "train a child" creates a helpful and healthy understanding of discipleship. It is more than teaching or telling. It is coaching, guiding, challenging, and supporting.

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If I decided to hit the gym (the real one with ellipticals and dumbbells-not the one in building C where I do more eating than exercising) and I wanted to hire a personal trainer, there are some things I would expect from that person. First off, (unless they happened to have a very specific side gig) I would not hire a clown, a chef, a math teacher, or a pastor to be my trainer. I would hire someone that was a professional trainer. Someone who had been trained themselves, who was more knowledgeable and capable than me, and had the capacity to help me reach my goals.

As I began my training I would not expect the trainer to set me on the highest elliptical setting, the fastest treadmill speed, or the heaviest weights. A good trainer would see what I am already capable of, and then start from there.
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I also would not expect my trainer to stand next to me silent, or to simply give me instructions. Have you ever been to the gym with no idea how to use the equipment and just feel ridiculous trying to look at the little 2 dimensional picture on the machine and then copy it in 3 dimensions. A good trainer would show me how to use the machines, stretch properly and the safe way to lift weights. And they would answer any questions I have about what I am doing.

If we parallel this analogy, one thing we certainly need to focus on before we make strides to disciple others is that we are spiritually fit to do so. None of us will ever truly be perfect, or have it all just right, but we can evaluate how we live our own lives, what disciplines we do daily, how we interact with God and others, even how we match up to the dos and don'ts in Proverbs 22.

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I was given advice one time to always be in the middle of discipleship. You should have somebody who is more spiritually fit than you discipling you and pouring into your life and once you have the capability you should be pouring into somebody else.

Think of it a little bit like these weights. When you first become a Christian, whether you were born into a Christian family and brought up knowing Jesus, or you met him at a later point in life, at the beginning of your faith journey, engaging and spiritual discipline should be like lifting this 5-pound weight. A good physical trainer would suggest starting small and growing from there. Once you get to the point where you are ready to use the 10-pound weight, you're able to pass your 5-pound weight on to someone else, and show them how to use it.

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Discipleship in your home may feel like an overwhelming task. Leading church programs like Bible studies or prayer groups have specific time frames. Discipling another adult who has come to faith is also not typically a round the clock job. However, those little humans that follow you around and constantly need to be fed as much spiritually as physically, are always there.

Think about it this way. Just as the church should be a reflection of a healthy family. A healthy family should be a reflection of the church. The core values that Daryl spoke on in the last series are just as applicable in the home as they are in the church. Prayer, truth, mission, vision, and love should be just as prevalent in the home as they are here. And just as it was mentioned these are not the only core or healthy values for the church, your home may have others as well.

If engaging in spiritual disciplines in your home is already something you feel successful in as a Family, my encouragement would be to invite other families into your home and be in intentional relationships with other people and to share your wisdom and guidance.

If spiritual disciplines are something that your family struggles with implementing for whatever reason, the best advice I could give is to start small. (Hold up 5-lb weight). You could be in a place where these have never been a part of your home and church programs are the only times of engagement with faith. You could have kids that are getting older and it is more difficult to figure out appropriate practices. You could have changed location, or schedules. You could have simply had a good plan in place and a crisis or major life event caused your discipline to go on a longer than needed break.

Life happens, no one is perfect, and you cannot know what you were never taught. I would love to stand up here and say I get it all right every day. If I am being honest, I have a really hard time maintaining our normal disciplines when we are away on trips, and we are a lot, and then getting back into them when we are back home is really difficult. Every person's life circumstances come with a set of challenges.

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And there are what can feel like an overwhelming amount of resources and opinions and advice on the matter, but you need to figure out what works for your family. Also, understand that the purpose of discipleship in your home is not to check off a to-do list to look good or qualify for the kingdom, but to truly center your life around God's will. Engaging in spiritual disciplines in your home is a reflection of God's love for humanity. It creates trust and peace in your household.

Something that is central in our home is doing our best to make sure that our kids know that they can trust us because we trust the Lord.

I am confident that just like me, no one here would ever say that they've done this perfectly. It takes practice and it takes failure and it may be an uphill battle, but it's worth it. I have never met one person who strived for discipleship to be a priority with their children that regretted that decision, but I have met many who wish they had been more intentional in this area and could go back and do it again.

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Some core values in our household that help with the discipleship of our children are…

- Being intentional with prayer. We pray at all times of the day, not only in petition and intercessions, but in gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise.

  We not only speak prayers from our mouths as parents, but encourage our children to pray on their own.

- Engaging in scripture. At different times we read from the regular Bible, or a paraphrased kids version. We also enjoy watching kids Bible story videos together. We also ask our kids what they learned during church programs and at times use the take-home pages from Sunday school as discussion prompts.
- Serving others joyfully. I have a pretty easy way of managing that considering the work that I do, but we are also intentional to involve our family in service in other areas outside of the church like delivering cards at the VA or visiting with shut-ins.
- And worship. We spend time each day, whether in the car or at home or at church engaged in musical worship together. (I was trying to review my message last night and was distracted by the "scream singing" of worship songs from my living room downstairs.)

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As much as sometimes it feels like being raised in a Christian household breeds a boring testimony, it is actually a blessing and an amazing testimony for someone to say they were never unaware of Christ's love for them.
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I would encourage everyone whether you have young kids, are empty nesters, are single, engaged, newlyweds, or widows, to take a moment today to consider what the core values of your home are.

And remember, whether it's in your home or in a different circumstance when it comes to living out this mission of making disciples, start small and grow from there.

Closing Prayer: Lord, we do ask that you give us the strength to apply scripture to our lives. To not just be hearers, but doers of the Word. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to be close to you in a variety of different ways. Help us not to take discipleship for granted, but learn all we can to help ourselves and others be drawn near to you. We ask this in your holy and precious name. Amen.

Closing Song:

Closing Word and Benediction: Pastor Diddle

The Lord has given us all something to pass along … to pass along to someone else. And He's put people in our lives whether they're intimately related to us or incidentally near us – our neighbors, children in the neighborhood, young people looking for someone to speak something of Christ to them.

Start small … but start. Start small if you need to – but start … engaging with other people and leading them further down their path to Christ. That is part of discipleship, ours and theirs, and that's what the Lord wants.

Thanks so much for coming to worship today. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen

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