

## How To Cultivate A Child's Spiritual Life

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Rich Nathan  
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Family Mess 2  
1 Samuel 3

I want to begin with a simple question: What is a parent's responsibility concerning their children? Mom, Dad, what is your job description? What are you responsible for you in your child's life? And how do you know if you've succeeded as a parent?

Certainly, we parents are responsible to meet our children's physical needs – to feed them, to clothe them, to shelter them, to give the proper medical attention, to make sure that they're engaged in physical activity, to protect them from physical danger and abuse. Certainly, parents, at a minimum need to provide for their children's physical needs.

And we are responsible to provide for our children's educational needs – to make sure that our kids get proper schooling. A good parent will help their children with their homework; we'll read to our kids; we'll have books in our home; we'll provide intellectual stimulation. We'll give them music lessons and art lessons. A good parent will take their children to libraries and to museums and historical sites to stimulate their children's intellectual curiosity.

Good parents are also responsible to help meet our children's emotional needs – to love our children, to hug them, to kiss them, to listen to them, to help them navigate their feelings and their frustrations.

And, of course, there are other things that good parents do. We try to provide our children with some financial training, with career direction, with dating counsel.

But what about our children's spiritual lives? In so many books on parenting there is no discussion about cultivating our children's spiritual lives.

You know, the Bible gives us two different Greek words for our English word "life." The first Greek word is "bios"

### **Bios = biological life**

Bios is biological life; material life. But there is a second Greek word that John repeatedly uses; it is the Greek word "zoe"

### **Zoe = spiritual life**

We see zoe used in John 1:4:

**John 1:4 (NIV)**

**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.**

Spiritual life can only be found in Christ.

Now it is the neglect of zoe – spiritual life – that makes Americans so unhappy. We constantly think that if we have more bios – more material life – then we will be satisfied. Because the message that we constantly hear from every marketer and every advertiser is essentially you are just material. Every advertisement is about bios, about your body, feeding your body, pampering your body; adorning your body; comforting your body; relaxing your body; improving your body; exercising your body, clothing your body; strengthening; feeding; satisfying your body. It is bios, bios, bios.

And the message that we get from marketers is so long as you cater to bios, your material life, your biological life, you will be a satisfied human being. Yet we find wealthy people taking anti-depressants and Hollywood stars checking in and out of rehab. What's going on?

The Bible tells us that you need more than bios. You need zoe – spiritual life. Your children need zoe – spiritual life. Jesus says this to us over and over again. In Matthew 4 when Jesus was tempted by the devil, one of the temptations was all about this distinction between bios, material life, and zoe, spiritual life. The devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread and Jesus responds and says in Matthew 4.4 these words:

**Matthew 4:4 (NIV)**

**Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

Children need more than food to be satisfied. The poor need more than food and the wealthy need more than new cars and bigger homes. People need to feast upon God's Word. To a woman who kept looking to men and sexual relationships for life, Jesus points out the distinction between bios and zoe when he tells her in John 4.13, 14 these words:

**John 4:13–14 (NIV)**

**Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

Here is what I'm saying. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford English professor, who wrote about zoe in his wonderful book, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis said,

*God created us. He invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gas and it doesn't run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. God himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That's why it's just no good asking God to make you happy in your own way without having to bother about Christianity. God can't give you happiness and peace apart from himself. There's no such thing.*

The problem is people try to pour into their engine something other than God. That's why the engine conks out. Let me ask you a question. Parents, what have you poured into your children's engines that will keep them running long term? Just bios, fuel for their bodies, or have you thought about pouring zoe, life for their spirits?

You know, at every baby dedication that we do here at Vineyard Columbus I say to parents: "Parents, your church family supports this baby dedication today. You may have family members here and friends who are watching, who support your decision to dedicate your child to the Lord. But parents, do you understand that you are primarily responsible for cultivating your child's spiritual life? That your child's spiritual life is not a responsibility that you can simply delegate to the church or to children's ministry, or to a Christian school. Do you accept primary responsibility to cultivate your children's spiritual life?"

Friends, along with meeting our children's physical needs, their emotional needs, their educational needs, cultivating our children's spiritual lives is part of the job description given to every parent by God. I've called today's talk, "How to Cultivate a Child's Spiritual Life." Let's pray.

### **1 Samuel 3 (NIV)**

**The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and**

stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’” Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “Here I am.” “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.” The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

### The importance of models

#### 1 Samuel 3:1–4 and 11-14(NIV)

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

#### 1 Samuel 3:11–14 (NIV)

And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

Cultivating a child’s spiritual life is not just a matter of words - “do as I say” – cultivating a child’s spiritual life is way more a matter of example and model – “do as I do”. There must be a living example. In every baby dedication I say to parents: “Parents, do you commit yourself, by God’s grace, to live before your child in such a way that they will want to come to know your Savior, Jesus Christ?” There is almost nothing more powerful than a living example.

Paul said this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:4-5:

**2 Timothy 1:4–5 (NIV)**

**Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.**

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, said that the best way to learn the right thing to do is to observe good people and then imitate them by doing what they do. Haven't you found this in your own life, friend? If you had a really great mother, or a great dad, and you are raising your own children, you remember what your mom or dad did in a situation and you do that. If you've ever sat under a great pastor or have been helped by a Christian mentor, in different situations you think about what they did. I've often called to mind different things that John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, said to me in navigating different tricky pastoral situations. For you, the model may have been a great boss, a great teacher, a great coach, a leader of your Christian youth group.

There is tremendous power in being around a great model. Mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, your children, your grandchildren need to see that you are a better parent, a better grandparent because you are connected to God. They need to observe you going to the source, actually satisfying your own thirst with the spiritual water that you are recommending that they drink.

One of the great tragedies is adults who grew up in supposedly Christian families, who absolutely dread going to church because it makes them feel so crazy and hypocritical. So many kids find themselves living in these two contradictory experiences: mom and dad do their Christian thing at church on Sunday and then they fight like cats and dogs on Monday through Saturday. It is so much better if a child discovers that the fact that mom or dad goes to church makes mom or dad a better parent and a better husband, a better wife – that they're not living these contradictory lives. Single moms are not dragging men into their homes, but mom and dad return from church more loving, more tuned to their kids, less angry, more willing to apologize for wrongs.

Kids need to learn from a living model that God makes a difference for good in a person's life. That going to God is really the best and wisest way to live life.

Now Eli failed the test of modeling. Look at this with me in vv. 1-2.

**1 Samuel 3:1–2 (NIV)**

**The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes**

**were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place.**

One of the great marks of God's judgment on his people in the Bible is that God stops talking. In the scriptures God's prolonged silence is a judgment. In Amos 8:11-12 we read this:

**Amos 8:11–12 (NIV)**

**"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.**

And we read in Psalm 74:9 these words:

**Psalm 74:9 (NIV)**

**We are given no signs from God; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be.**

If a friend stops talking to you, or if your spouse stops talking to you, you know you are in trouble. Something has gone dreadfully wrong in your relationship. The same is true in your relationship with God. If God is utterly silent, if there is no one ever at the other end of the phone when you call, then you do need to ask yourself the question: why is there this wall between me and God?

And communities need to ask that question, if there is never any prophetic word from God. Why has God stopped talking?

Eli was a picture of the low spiritual state of Israel. Look at this again with me.

**1 Samuel 3:2 (NIV)**

**One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place.**

Eli sums up in his own person the spiritual state of Israel. He is almost blind. He's half asleep. He's lethargic. We find out later that he is massively overweight, over-stuffed, and spiritually dull. Eli failed the test of modeling.

You know, parents and grandparents, Christian leaders, teachers, coaches, those of you who have any influence on children or on young adults, one of the most important ways that you can cultivate a child or a young adult's spiritual life is by finishing your Christian life well. The Apostle Paul was absolutely obsessed with finishing well.

Paul understood life to be a race that you have to run until you cross the finish line. You can't stop five yards short of the tape. When he met with the Ephesians elders for the last time, these elders whom he loved, Paul said in Acts 20:24:

**Acts 20:24 (NIV)**

**However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.**

He challenged the Corinthians to finish well:

**1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)**

**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.**

Paul describes his joy at the end of his life this way in 2 Timothy 4:7:

**2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)**

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

There are many, many leaders in the Bible as well as in church history who have finished well. There is Joseph, Joshua, Daniel, the apostles, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Pope John Paul II, Billy Graham, and millions of Christians who are not nearly as well known. They did not stop ten yards short of the tape, but ran all the way through to the end, right into the arms of Jesus.

There may be even more leaders, like Eli, who ran out of gas before the end because of bad choices that they made somewhere along the way, because of sinful compromises, because of a growing hole in their inner lives.

And over and over again, you see in both the Bible and in contemporary churches leader after leader who fail to finish well. Sad stories are found everywhere in scripture. There's Noah, King Saul, King Solomon, King Asa, Judas, Demas.

And we know from the newspapers of so many leaders, folks on the national scene as well as the local scene, who have failed to end well. How many churches have suffered terrible declines because a leader was discovered to have had an affair, or was involved in some shady business deals?

Again, if we want to cultivate a child or young adult's spiritual life, there is almost nothing more important than a consistent Christian model seen in a parent, a grandparent, a pastor, an influential Christian leader which leads to this first and most basic rule of parenting:

## **The most basic rule of parenting: maintain your own spiritual life!**

You know the instruction that flight attendants give to parents before take-off. They always say, “In case of a drop in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead compartments. Please secure your own oxygen mask first, and then help your child with their oxygen mask.” They understand that if you are going to help your child, you need to make sure that you are in a position to actually offer help. Make sure you are spiritually alive, parents, then you can help cultivate your child’s spiritual life.

One way, parents, for you to secure your own oxygen mask and cultivate your own spiritual life is to connect with one of our small groups here at Vineyard Columbus. Many, many parents say: “Well, I just can’t go to a small group because I’ve got children who can’t be left alone; and, we can’t afford a babysitter every week.” We’ve got three or four dozen family-friendly small groups – coed groups, JH groups, women’s groups.

One thing we did when Marlene and I were raising our own children was we hosted a small group in our house. We found it was easier for our children to just stay at home; they would go upstairs and go to bed in their own beds. And we wouldn’t miss much of the meeting. It worked great for us. We did that for years while our children were growing up.

When we want to cultivate our children’s faith, we need to consider not only the importance of models, but the importance of listening.

### **The importance of listening to God.**

#### **1 Samuel 3:4–10 (NIV)**

**Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”**

There are so many spiritual lessons in this text about cultivating a child’s spiritual life. One of the lessons that we discover is that every child needs their own personal relationship with God. Adults can help to point children to God, but you, Mom, you, Dad, cannot be God for your child. It says here in 1 Samuel 3:7:

**1 Samuel 3:7 (NIV)**

**Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.**

Now, mom, dad, grandma and grandpa, teacher, you cannot force a child to have a relationship with God. Christ does not force himself on a person. He invites us to himself. We read in Revelation 3:20 these words:

**Revelation 3:20 (NIV)**

**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.**

But God has absolutely structured things so that every human being has a choice in the matter. Sadly, we parents are limited in what we can do regarding cultivating our children's spiritual lives. I don't want this talk to create undue guilt. You can be a great model; you can secure your own spiritual life; you can show your child that you regularly go to Christ as the source of your own life; you can demonstrate before your child that the only reason your life works at all is because of your relationship with Christ. Nevertheless, your child does have a choice in the matter about whether they're going to go to God or not. And we can't get into the inside any other person's heart, even your own children, and make that choice for them.

Ultimately, the choice to become a follower of Christ rests with each individual. At the end of this message, I'm going to give each of you a choice to become a follower of Jesus. Samuel needed to choose to go to God for himself. The choice was his. As the old saying goes: "Ultimately, God has no grandchildren." In other words, no one is related to God by virtue of their parent's faith or their grandparent's faith – and we need to communicate that to a child. "Son, daughter, you need your own faith in Christ. I can pray for you, but you need to learn how to pray for yourself. You need to know how to go to the source."

And we learn in this text that God is willing to speak many, many times. I mentioned before about the tragedy of God going silent at the other end of the phone. What we know from scripture and what many of us know from our own experiences, is that before God goes silent, he speaks and he speaks many, many times.

Brothers and sisters, have you had God speak to you many, many times about a matter? It could be a word of correction: "I want you to break off this relationship." "I want you to repent of your anger." "I want you to forgive someone that you've been harboring a grudge against." It could be a word of encouragement where the Lord is saying to you: "Come to me; trust me; spend time with me; turn to me." God spoke three times to Samuel and he will do that with you and me. Have you noticed that God is willing to speak many times?

The really important thing therefore is to listen to God.

**1 Samuel 3:9–10 (NIV)**

**So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”**

To cultivate a child’s spiritual life, we need to teach children that:

**To listen to God is all important**

Samuel’s spiritual life began when he listened to God. According to the Bible, everything rests of listening to God’s voice. The central prayer of Judaism is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4.

**Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV)**

**4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

It is the cry of God’s heart that his people would listen to him.

**Psalm 81:8 (NIV)**

**Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—if you would only listen to me, Israel!**

And then, you hear the brokenness in God’s heart in Psalm 81:11:

**Psalm 81:11 (NIV)**

**“But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me.**

The people in the Bible were regularly deceived by the idea that what God really wanted was more religious activity from them. We read this in Jeremiah 6:20:

**Jeremiah 6:20 (NIV)**

**What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me.”**

But God doesn’t want more religious activity, more great sacrifices, more religious show. What does God want? God tells us what he wants in the verse before in Jeremiah 6:19:

**Jeremiah 6:19 (NIV)**

**Hear, you earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.**

He wants us to listen to him.

Now, the place where we start in listening to God, the place where we start with our children listening to God is, of course, the Bible. I know that this is not spectacular. Nobody is going to stand back and say, “Oooohhh...ahhhh...” because you are a person who studies the Bible, or you read the Bible with your child. But the Bible is absolutely the most common way that God is going to speak to you or speak to a child. The Holy Spirit inspired this book. Read the Bible with your child. Read the Bible with them over breakfast or dinner or at bedtime.

And before you pick up the Bible to read it, pray and say: “Lord, speak to me personally through this book as I read your Word. Lord, as my child and I read your Word together, speak to us personally.” Very often you are going to have the experience of being personally addressed by God through the words of the Bible.

God speaks to us through his people. It is in small groups, in Christian community that we hear the Word of God spoken to us clearly. Here is what we read in Colossians 3:16:

**Colossians 3:16 (NIV)**

**Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.**

Verse 16 is preceded by eight verses regarding our relationships with one another. And God speaks to us not only through scripture and through other followers of Christ, but he speaks to us by his Holy Spirit as we pray and listen to God. One of the many ways that the Kingdom of God goes forward in this world is that people listen to what the Spirit is saying to them and they do the simple things that the Holy Spirit is instructing.

One of the counselors on our staff, Christine Childers, shared a very simple story of listening to God this week. She said that she was helping a woman who was unemployed and needed housing. As she prayed for this woman one morning, she felt the Spirit say to her to give her a daily devotional reading from a wonderful little devotional book titled Jesus Calling by Sarah Young. We have many copies of it in our bookstore. And so Christine sent her an excerpt from Jesus Calling. She thought that was what the Spirit wanted her to do.

The woman was greatly encouraged reading the devotion. And then Chris heard from this same woman a few days later. The woman said:

*Dear Chris,*

*On April 3 you sent me an inspirational message from your devotional, Jesus Calling. Since that day my life began to unfold spiritually in ways that I did not expect. April 3 was a Tuesday when you sent the email. At the Saturday service a lady from one of my small groups said that God had placed me on her heart and she handed me a copy of Jesus Calling! I shared your email with her and she could not believe it. I was in such a low place, but since I began reading that book faithfully, I've grown spiritually. God has always spoken to me, but now I listen...*

She talks about God opening up work for her. And then she closes:

*Thank you for sending me that email on April 3. Most of all, for praying for me, it made a huge difference in my life.*

The Kingdom of God goes forward as we listen to God! By the way, we have copies of Jesus Calling at our main campus bookstore.

Now this story about Samuel communicates to us another thing about listening, we must teach children:

**To listen to God, we must slow down and be quiet.**

**1 Samuel 3:8–10 (NIV)**

**A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."**

Friend, the greatest obstacle to hearing God's voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is simple over-busyness. We Americans live overstuffed, over filled, over-stimulated lives. We eat too much. We shop too much. We own too much. And we cram too much into our houses and into crowded lives. And if we were to be honest and authentic, we would say that there is simply no room in our lives for the voice of God. We are, as a culture, addicted to busyness. We obsessively try to cram more and more productivity into less and less time.

Everyone multi-tasks. Just look at what people do when they drive down the highway. Here we are hurtling down the highway at 70+ mph in a 2-3 ton vehicle and what are we doing? We are talking on our cell phone. A woman is putting on mascara in her rearview mirror. Someone is fumbling for a CD in the glove compartment.

One day – true story – my wife, Marlene, and I were driving on the outerbelt on the north side of town. I was in the passenger seat-watching people pass by us in their cars. I noticed that every single driver that drove by us was multi-tasking. I said to Marlene: “Look, he’s on his cell phone. Look at her. She is putting on lipstick now in her rearview mirror. He’s drinking coffee. Look at that!” Driving right next to us was a woman who had a bowl of cereal on her steering wheel and she was eating the bowl of cereal while driving 75 mph! She was flying by us and she was eating a bowl of cereal with a spoon and she was steering the car with the bottom of her bowl of cereal.

Now, you are not going to hear the voice of God very well when you are driving 75 mph steering your car with a bowl of cereal and trying not to dump it in your lap.

Our first calling as followers of Christ is to friendship with Christ. Our first calling is not activity for Christ. Our first calling – your first calling is friendship with Jesus Christ. The first calling of your child is to friendship with Jesus Christ. But your child needs to slow down and be quiet – to turn off the computer, to turn off the music, to put down the video game, to learn to listen.

Let me ask you, friend, in your own life, how many of you would say that in the last month you took even five minutes of complete silence and said to the Lord what the child Samuel said: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”?

If you are stuck right now, if you are frustrated, if you’ve hit a wall in an area of your life, if you don’t have an answer, if you are just spinning your wheels and not making any forward progress, why not slow the rpm’s down long enough to ask God and to listen for his voice? You know, the Lord really is smarter than you and me. God is infinitely more creative than we are in coming up with solutions. He sees what you cannot see. He sees the future. He knows the consequences of our decisions. He sees the heart. He sees below the surface. God sees what we cannot see. He has answers for your life, especially, friend, when you are at a crossroads. When you are facing a new stage in your life, why not say the same thing the Old Testament leader Joshua said. When Joshua was facing a new stage in his ministry, he said to the Lord:

**Joshua 5:14 (NIV)**

**“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”**

Why not pray the prayer of the child Samuel, who grew up to be the leader of the nation of Israel, and was instructed to pray in 1 Samuel 3:9,

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.**

There is almost nothing more important for us 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans in cultivating our own spiritual lives than solitude and silence. The problem that we 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans have is that there is almost no space any more in our lives. We don't just work 9-5 jobs anymore. We find that technology has made it almost impossible for us to have any boundaries around our working lives. We can access our voicemail and our email and the Internet and Facebook and other social media from anywhere at any time. And so technology was supposed to help us live saner lives, but instead, we find us trying to cram more and more into our lives. And the terrible impact of technology on us is that it is damaging us spiritually. We're not able to find space to listen to God. To cultivate your spiritual life, to cultivate your child's spiritual life there is nothing more important than unplugging, slowing down, being quiet and listening to the still, small voice of God. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

In cultivating a child's spiritual life, I've talked about the importance of models, the importance of listening to God, and I want to close by talking briefly about:

### **The importance of support**

#### **1 Samuel 3:4–9 (NIV)**

**Then the LORD called Samuel.**

**Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.**

Children need help in interpreting spiritual reality. Samuel was not able on his own to know that it was God who was speaking to him. He needed Eli's help. And your child, your grandchild, the young adult that you are teaching or mentoring needs your help in being able to sort through all of the confusing messages in the media and from the world, and from their friends, and school and to figure out in the confusion what God is saying, what God is trying to communicate. What is the Word of God for me? Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

One of my favorite understandings of leadership from just about my favorite book on leadership titled Leadership is an Art by Max DePree, Max DePree says:

***Leaders interpret reality for other people.***

That really has shaped my own ministry. That's what I think my role as a pastor is – it is to interpret reality. Here is what happened, but here is the meaning of what happened. Here is what God is doing. Here is how God would view this or that. That's what children need. Here is what happened in your school today. But here is what God might be saying through what happened.

Children need support.

Let me close with this. There is a wonderful book written by one of America's premier sociologists of religion, a man by the name of Christian Smith titled Souls in Transition. It is about the spiritual life of 20-somethings. Christian Smith does an extensive survey of young adults through hundreds of personal interviews, through following young adults over the course of a decade and by broader surveys. Christian Smith, at one point in the book Souls in Transition, asked the question: What leads to a sustained Christian faith for young adults?

What is it that will cause a child and teen, who is around Christianity, to be a Christ-follower in their 20's? What is it that leads to sustained faith?

Christian Smith goes through all of the data – you know, going to a Christian high school, going on missions trips, belonging to a youth group – but here is what he discovered. He said there really are six things that come up over and over again that in combination with each other leads to a sustained Christian faith not only through childhood and the teen years, but into adulthood. Here are the factors:

### **1. Strong parental faith**

The more spiritually committed a parent is, especially during the teen years, the more often we see teens continuing in Christian faith into adulthood.

### **2. A teen who has personal spiritual experiences**

When faith is personal for a teen and they experience the Spirit, they can't get away from that in their 20's.

### **3. A teen frequently prays and reads the Bible**

The teen goes to the source themselves.

### **4. A teen has their questions about faith thoughtfully answered**

### **5. A teen is made fun of for their faith.**

### **6. A teen has many adults in their church to turn to for help and support**

You know, when Marlene and I were raising our own kids we were praying one time for our kids and God said something totally unexpected to us. He told us to start a teen group. Now, I'm not particularly given to being around crowds of teenagers. I liked my own teens and I liked their friends. But I was never a person who hung out with crowds of teenagers and neither was Marlene, except when we were teenagers. But one day absolutely surprisingly, we felt spoken to that we were supposed to start a teen group in our home. We kept that group going for five years. And in our church today are still many of the teens that were in that group? They're now in their late 20's and early 30's. They continued to follow Christ.

There is almost no greater impact that you could have on another human being than working with a child or working with a teen. Let me ask you something. College students, 20-somethings, 30-somethings, those of you who are parents, married, singles, might the Holy Spirit be speaking to you and saying: "I want you to get involved with some of the teens or middle schoolers here at Vineyard Columbus?" Here is what I'm going to ask you to do. Get in touch with the folks who lead our teen ministry. Here at the main campus, its Alen Auguste and Brett Evans. At the Sawmill Campus it is Greg Ball. At our East Campus, Greg Dolce is the leader.

## How To Cultivate A Child's Spiritual Life

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Rich Nathan  
April 21, 2013  
Family Mess 2  
1 Samuel 3

- I. The importance of models
- II. The importance of listening to God
  - A. Teach children that to listen to God is all important
  - B. Teach children that to listen to God we must slow down and be quiet
- III. The importance of support