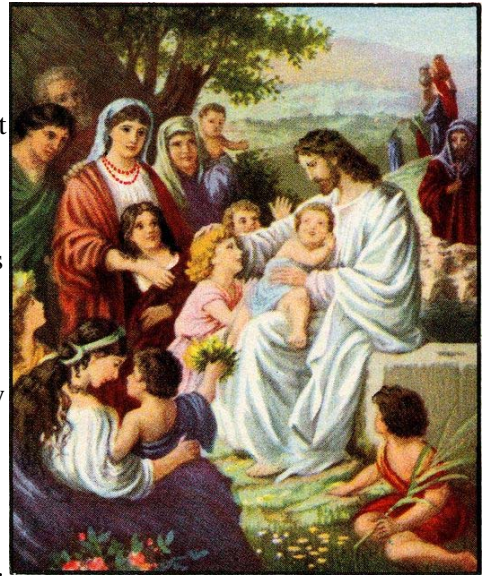


Jesus and the Kids

By Jason Evans

We've tossed out several Bible story books in our home. In a Western world painted with pictures of Middle Eastern "terrorists" the last thing we want is for our children to forget that Jesus looked a lot more like bin Laden than their white dad. We realized this one evening when reading out of one of these books that had been given to us as a gift. Our daughter quipped to her brother, "Maybe you'll look like Jesus when you grow up!" Jesus did have blond hair in the cartoon, just like her brother. I quickly pulled out a news magazine with photos from Iraq. "I'm pretty sure Jesus looked a lot more like that guy than this cartoon drawing." Their faces were puzzled. The book was in the trash by the time the kids were in bed.



In great part, my wife and I have practiced "church" the way we have due to our children. When I resigned from professional ministry, my wife was pregnant with our first child, our daughter. Around that same time, I had the privilege of interviewing author and pastor Chris Seay of [Ecclesia](#) in Houston, TX. He said something that I thought was quite profound. Out of all the interviews I've conducted, his words have stuck with me more than most:

We tend to subdivide the Body in a way that has no natural relationships or interaction because we're built on felt-need models. Instead, single people need to learn from married people; young marrieds without kids should learn from married people with kids; and married people with kids should learn from married people with grown kids. ([read the article](#))

I don't know if Seay would have drawn the conclusion I did from that statement. But when he said that it was as if the light was turned on for me. I realized that my Christian experience had primarily been "subdivided" just as Seay explained. As a leader of young people, I often saw the complete disconnect between parents and their children in regards to the child's spiritual development. That was *my* responsibility.

Every Sunday morning, we all head in our varied directions. The elderly go to their senior's study. The children go to Sunday School. Teenagers go to youth group. In an era of obsession with a programmatic approach to ministry we had completely diced up the Body of Christ. No wonder our divorce rates were as high as any other groups! No wonder young people left after high school, never to return! With my own child on the way, I wanted to do things different. Not just for my own need as a protective parent. But as a person wanting to provide a Christian paradigm that better prepared my children to be missional people and allow them to learn about life from people from a variety of stages and experience.

Since then, as we've met in more egalitarian modes over the years, there have not been any great "solutions" of what to do with children during meetings, worship, prayer. A long time ago, I stopped trying to do anything about kids during our meetings. It bugs some people. Mostly young, single adults. They'll get over it. Kids are honest. They don't pretend to be holy when they aren't. They don't pretend to be interested in conversations that go nowhere. But attempting to talk over the noise or putting them in

front of a movie isn't the answer. The answer doesn't even exist in those moments when a community meets. It is in the rest of life.

We, as parents, need to take back our right to be our children's spiritual directors. We owe it to our children. I have told families in our community that it is our responsibility as a community to help them be more radical followers of Jesus so that they may do the same for their children. Of course, we welcome children in our meetings. We are a spiritual family. With joy, we work through each of our limitations and abilities, no matter what age or capacity. But we are conscious of the fact that we have to support and empower parents to be just that: parents.

What we discovered is that many of us don't know where to start with our children. Other people had done it for us for generations. Christian bookstores aren't much help in resourcing us either. They sell terrible children's music and offer cheesy white-Jesus story books that typically pull out oversimplified moral platitudes from complex narratives.

The first time I read to my children the story of Noah and the Ark, they were appalled! I decided to read the classic Bible story—that exists on everything from wallpaper to night lights—out of the Message version. I stopped midway through the story, looked up and asked, “What do you guys think about this so far?” With jaw on the floor and eyes wide open, my son replied, “God is mean!”

This storytelling set us into a week-long conversation that we continued to come back to. Was God mean? What does this say about justice? What do we know about God's promises to us because of this story? What does this tell us about what God thinks about Creation? Our four year old son and six year old daughter wrestled with these uncertainties and came to their own conclusions that were often different from each others and mine. Of course, I told them what I believed about this story but it didn't make Noah and the Ark anymore a cute story!

Why do I share these stories? Because we need to be deliberate about sharing ideas, stories and resources with each other as parents trying to raise kids that are growing up in a globalized, post-Christendom world. Because we need to root our kids in the fact that biblical narrative is supposed to inform reality today in every context. Because we can't depend on programs and products to do it for us anymore (not that we ever should have). Because when we've dissected ourselves into age-specific quadrants we've been prone to make the biblical story no more than feel-good solutions for minor life problems. Rather than an over-arching story that we form our entire lives around. Chances are, your children are more prepared for this than you are.

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