

A Three-Strand Cord: The Strength of Church, School, and Home Working Together

By Seth Van Dyke

The responsibilities of a parent are many. They include teaching kids to walk, read, ride a bike, learning on the fly, and being patient to name a few. No two children are the same and none come with an owner's manual. We as Christians, however, have the Bible that gives us directions and commands on raising the next generation in the fear of the Lord. Even with the Bible's help there will be sleepless nights and stressful days. Thankfully, as an old proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child," and for us as Christians, this "village" should include the home, the church, and the school. An ideal analogy for these three institutions working together as a team is like a three-strand cord as mentioned in Ecclesiastes 4. In an always changing and ever-increasing secular culture, we need these three institutions to work together more than ever to disciple and raise our children.

Before getting to the importance of teamwork we need to look at the reason for it. Recent Gallup Poll responses on religion show a steady decline in America's religious beliefs. A quick glance at our society makes this evident, but if we look at poll numbers the decline becomes even more clear. Since the year 2000, people who view religion as 'very important' has dropped from 59% to 48% while those who say it 'isn't very important' has risen from 12% to 27%. Religious preferences have followed similar trends. Those identifying with a Christian preference in 2000 were at 57% while only at 46% in 2020 and those as "None" rose from 8% to 20%. These are quite the changes in 20 years and has seen church membership drop from over two-thirds to less than half of our population. One more set of numbers to look at is church attendance. 'Every week' attendance dropped from 32% to 24%, and those attending 'most weeks' dropped from 14% to 9%. On the other end, 'seldom attenders' dropped from 27% to 25% while those that 'never go' jumped from 13% to 29%. This means that the top two attendance groups dropped from 46% to just 33% while the bottom two rose from 40% to 54%, with the

biggest jump in the those that never attend. This change is significant and indicates where church attendance is headed.

While the numbers in the previous paragraph paint a grim picture, another agency has done research that sheds light on an entirely different set of findings. Cardus is an agency that does research on the links between faith, family, and education and the impact the three influences have on children as they grow and continue through life as adults. According to a WORLD news article that references a survey released by Cardus in 2018, “Children who graduate from evangelical, Protestant high schools report a significantly higher belief in orthodox Christian teaching; are more likely to pray, read the Bible, attend church regularly, and tithe; and are less likely to switch religious affiliation or turn from their faith as adults.” Later on, the article states, “Graduates of evangelical, Protestant schools are more likely than their public school counterparts to attend church regularly as adults, even if they came from similar family and socio-economic backgrounds.” This information is critical to consider. Christians everywhere should heed the important role that Christian education plays in the lifelong development of children and the impact it has as they move into adulthood.

In light of the recent Gallup Poll findings, it’s critical churches take note of the Cardus numbers and ask the question, “What can we do to invest in our future members, the kids?” Since the local church is one strand of a three-strand cord, it should look to partner with the other two. One of these, Christian schools, ought to be seen in the same light as any other mission agency. In this instance the Christian school is discipling the local congregation’s own future in conjunction with the church and family. Many churches might argue that they are already investing in their children through children and youth ministry programs. While programs may be available both on Sundays and Wednesdays, they are a small portion of a child’s learning time compared to the hours spent at school. For example, if we use a generous 4 hours per week spent at church, it is minor compared to the 35-40 hours per week spent at school. As a community of believers we need to be honest with ourselves on where our kids are

influenced the most. Role models and Christian leaders should be abundant at church, but only 200 hours per year does not allow for a major impact. Most kids will have had more time than this at school in just 5 weeks.

The time difference just mentioned is one of many reasons churches should encourage and support Christian schools. We already looked at the numbers from Cardus showing the positive outcomes of Christian education. Graduates have larger families, are more faithful church attendees, read their Bibles and pray, and are more likely to tithe. These characteristics make for much stronger churches and should stabilize congregations. Many Christian schools covet church support as ministry partners and would be able to offer additional programming as a result.

As one of the other strands of our three-strand cord, parents are responsible for raising their children in the fear of the Lord. If we look again at the number of hours where kids spend their time, we see it comes to approximately 124 hours per week at home. Take out the hours for sleep and we are down to 68. The problem with these 68 hours is that they are often interrupted and may become fewer as children get older and get jobs or participate in school activities. Still, kids on average spend more time at home or with parents than they do at either church or school. As parents, we need to be intentional about following the Bible's command to teach and raise our children to love and obey the Lord. Deuteronomy 6 makes it clear that teaching children happens every day from sunrise to sunset. Verse 7 says, *"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."* Teaching is one of the greatest responsibilities parents have, and countless studies have proven how important it is to have mom and dad invested in the lives of their children.

If we take the time to look at key Bible verses, we get a better understanding of why it is important to have the church, the school, and the home working together. The first one is Luke 18 verses 15-17 in which Jesus has the children come to him. He takes the time to talk to them, bless them,

and maybe even play with them. He then goes on to say we must all receive the kingdom of heaven like children. In a similar instance in Matthew 18 the disciples argue over who is the greatest. Jesus then takes a child and again says we must be like children if we are to enter the kingdom. This time he goes on to say, *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”* The importance of these verses can’t be understated and should be seen as a warning. We have an important responsibility to teach children the Truth, and the best way to do so is to surround them with as many godly examples as we can.

Society continues to push for more radical and unbiblical stances ranging from evolution to gender identity to atheism, among others. As curricula change to reflect these beliefs we cannot be deceived, *“Bad company ruins good morals”* (1 Cor. 15:33). Instead, *“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”* (Phil. 4:8). Clearly, the Bible isn’t silent on the importance of who and what influences us. Christian schools and their teachers share the vision of raising and caring for children just as much as the church and parents. The school becomes an extension of the home and church to stress the importance of incorporating Scripture in all of life, not just at home or just on Sundays.

Let’s look back at the introduction and consider additional verses in Ecclesiastes 4. Before Solomon references the three-strand cord, he says that two are better than one, and this is especially true in the task of raising children. Kids that are raised in a Christian home and attend church are much better off than left to just one or the other. Teamwork is valuable in achieving a shared goal. If one or the other falters there is help and encouragement to keep pushing forward. How much more so when there are three teams working together! When kids are surrounded by godly leaders all day, they have a better chance of seeing and learning the importance of following Scripture. They will see that our

Christian walk isn't something only done on Sundays or at home, but rather something we are called to live continually. By working together as a three-strand cord we can raise kids who are much more likely to attend church as adults, thus supporting the church; have kids of their own that attend Christian schools; and hopefully start reversing the trend of kids leaving the church when they are adults. As Proverbs 22:6 states, *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

References:

- Deuteronomy 6:5-9 *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*
- Proverbs 22:6 *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him – a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*
- Luke 18:15-17 *Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”*
- Matthew 18:1-6 *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*
- 1 Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”*

- Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Gallup Poll:

- How important is religion?
 - Very: 2020 – 48%; 2010 – 54%; 2000 – 59%
 - Not very: 2020 – 27% 2010 – 20%; 2000 – 12%
- What is your religious preference?
 - Christian: 2020 – 46%; 2010 – 53%; 2000 – 57%
 - Catholic: 2020 – 22%; 2010 – 21%; 2000 – 25%
 - None: 2020 – 20%; 2010 – 14%; 2000 – 8%
- Are you a member of a church or synagogue?
 - Yes: 2020 – 47%; 2010 – 61%; 2000 – 68%
 - No: 2020 – 52%; 2010 – 38%; 2000 – 32%
- How often do you attend church or synagogue (includes remote)?
 - Every week: 2020 – 24% 2010 – 29% 2000 – 32%
 - Most weeks: 2020 – 9% 2010 – 10% 2000 – 14%
 - Seldom: 2020 – 25% 2010 – 25% 2000 – 27%
 - Never: 2020 – 29% 2010 – 20% 2000 – 13%

WORLD article link:

<https://wng.org/roundups/teaching-lifelong-lessons-in-faith-1617228915>