

My wife and I have been married since the fall of 2002, and we have owned 6 different properties since then. I have done quite a bit of renovations on each of them, and unfortunately Marcella has had to put up with undone projects for way too long. We typically only finish a home in time to sell it, and with all the unfinished projects at our home in Welland, there is no worry that we will be moving any time soon.

Along the way, I have used a variety of different stores and chains built for someone looking to improve their home. Two slogans from these stores have really stood out to me because of what they proclaim about each business. I find the two slogans are vastly different in their message. The first one came out in 2017 as Home Hardware's new tagline: ***Here's How.*** (show image)

"*Here's How*" makes it clear that ***they*** are the experts who can tell you what to do to get something done right. If you need to know something, especially something new, you can be confident that someone at Home Hardware will tell you what you need to get the job done. Not a bad slogan by any means, but it feels different from the second slogan that stood out to me. Around the same time, The Home Depot's slogan, "*You can do it; we can help*" (show image) projects confidence into a consumer, like me, into doing a project; their message is supportive. This empowers the "Do-it-yourselfer" by putting the ownership of the project in their hands. You can indeed "do it yourself", but you will also get the support you need from the staff at The Home Depot, instead of just being told *Here's How* from a distance, at Home Hardware.

As a former location pastor of our Welland location, I've been helping serve as the temporary kid's pastor there since just after last summer. This past fall, our kids' ministry department attended a conference together in Toronto. In one of the messages, we were given some sobering statistics about the spiritual growth of families. A study put out by Lifeway in 2007 showed that 66% of students graduating from high school were leaving the church between the ages of 18 and 22 years old. That means that only 1/3 of youth raised in the church would carry forward their life of faith. I found some more recent statistics, and they remain very similar. A few studies, including one by the Barna Group, showed that two-thirds of our youth continue to leave church, so approximately a third who continue with a life of faith. But, this more recent data also showed a new trend - that students are leaving at much younger ages. These studies report that the kids who leave are not just leaving the church, they are leaving behind their faith, and they are now leaving by the age of 14 or 15. The news rocked our family ministry team, as the task to help our children and youth live a life with Jesus feels more urgent than it has been.

But another stat hit us pretty hard too—that, I'm guessing, is related to the first one. We were told that when it came to who has the most influence on a child's life of faith, kids' pastors and youth pastors actually ranked pretty low - number 11 on the list of people who really make a difference in a kid's life with Jesus. That one stung a little as we are pretty passionate about our work at church.

In the top spots for the people who have the greatest impact and influence on a younger person's life of faith, are moms and dads. Grandparents come next on the list, followed by friends, siblings, and the top spots are rounded out with aunts and uncles. This was clarifying for us as the kids' ministry team, because it helped us solidify the focus of our ministry.

Our key takeaway: Parents and families are the key developers of faith, so our role should be that we come alongside parents and families to support them in that, similar to the way Home Depot says, *"You can do it; we can help."* Maybe as a parent you have adopted the Home Hardware way of thinking, where you relate to the church as some kind of 'expert' who will tell you how to raise kids to know Jesus. But, it is clear that parents are actually the primary influences on their children, so we want to come alongside in developing a life of faith that sticks with your children. I promise that there is something in this message for everyone, but first, let me talk about parenting. Moms and Dads, **The world will teach your child many things, but only you can develop them in the way of Jesus. (repeat)**

When my kids were younger, there was a time when I thought the 'Home Hardware' way was best, and I did leave much of their spiritual development to the church and the Christian schools that they went to. I assumed that my children would build a faith life by "osmosis", that the environments they were in, outside the home, were the experts and they were learning about the Bible there, so we didn't really have to do that too much. Early on, I know I was not very intentional about passing along my faith or inviting my children into learning about God and Jesus all that much through anything intentional I did. But I remember the grade one teacher at the Christian school I was the principal of at the time, had asked me one day if my children were saved. I froze and didn't really know what to say. First, because I grew up in a church tradition that didn't use that kind of language but secondly, and far more important, I just simply couldn't answer that question. "What kind of faith did my kids have?" That was an eye-opening moment for me. Even though Marcella and I followed Jesus, it did not automatically mean that our kids would just "inherit" our beliefs. I knew we needed to become more intentional with our kids about their faith development. We had to become "do it yourself-ers"—not of home improvement, but of spiritual development.

But then we had to ask ourselves, how could we make this a part of our daily living, when we were finding that life was already so busy and so hectic as is the reality for many families. The idea of making significant time to do regular devotions with our kids felt daunting, when we were already finding ourselves so tired every day. And to tell you the truth, at times, Marce and I are both not all that great at implementing new routines. There were weeks we would read the Jesus Story Book Bible (side note- if you don't have this Bible, you need to buy it) and then weeks where it just fell by the wayside. There were weeks where we really tuned in to the Southridge app and the activities they had for how to talk about God at the table, in the car, etc. There were times when our kids were really involved in helping out with Harvest Kitchen events, and other times not. But even though we were inconsistent, we were slowly inviting God to be part of our family and routines.

I want to take you to the book of Deuteronomy for a few minutes. Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Bible, which basically contains some messages that Moses wanted and needed to share with the people of Israel, to tell them how they should be different from the nations around them – Moses wanted to remind the Israelites that they are a chosen people. Moses shares the law that he received from God on Mount Sinai, but he also wants to share what living a life of faith can look like. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 says,

*4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 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. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

The text starts with the word “hear” so Moses is looking for the people of Israel to listen up, but it also was understood that when a text started with the word “hear”, what followed next was meant to be obeyed.

Hebrew scholars refer to this section of Deuteronomy as “The Shema” which is thought to be a pivotal text for the Jewish religion. This passage is a command. They saw the Shema as a perfect guide for how to live as God-followers and as parents, who understood that they were responsible for their children’s spiritual development.

The Shema continues with “The LORD our God” where the word LORD is capitalized in the text. This was meant to make it very clear that God is YAHWEH - the one true God. The name means “I Am” and that in a day and age when it could be easy to be swayed by other, false gods, the Israelites were to have their focus be on the one and only, true God.

Moses continues to share that the Israelites are to love God, with everything they have; fully and completely. With their hearts, their minds, and with all their strength. Moses does not just want his people to confess who God is, but to live their lives following God completely.

Verse 6 continues with God’s commandment to have these laws on the hearts of the people. Scholars today believe that Moses wanted to be clear that God did not just want the Israelites to follow a bunch of rules, but rather God wanted the people to take this faith very seriously. And Verse 7 is the focus for this message:

*7 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.*

Moses is encouraging a routine of sharing God’s goodness and telling stories of God’s kindness in their families. God wants to be a part of the daily lives of the Israelites, in everything they do.

It is referenced that Jesus Himself spoke the Shema a few times during his ministry and he modeled this life of faith to His followers as well.

Verses 8 and 9 wrap up the Shema with:

**8** *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9* *Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Jewish men would literally wear “the law” on their arms and head. The law was wrapped tightly in small boxes called phylacteries and then tied to either the upper part of the arm closest to the heart and around the head because they wanted to have the law close to them. These were also tied to doorposts around homes, so that there would be consistent physical reminders to follow the Shema. Later Bible verses talk about loving God with our hearts, soul and mind which mirrors these commands. Modern scholars believe that this is a metaphor for believers today who are to have this way of life on our minds and in use by our hands as acts of service.

Listen to how the Message Translation interprets Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Attention, Israel! GOD, our GOD! GOD the one and only!

**5** Love GOD, your GOD, with your whole heart: love Him with all that’s in you, love Him with all you’ve got! **6-9** *Write these commandments that I’ve given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you, and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates.*

So, what does this all mean for us today? Jewish traditions were heavily influential for early Christianity, so the Shema is as important to us today as it was to Moses and the Israelites back in their day. The heart of these passages is that we need to have a loving, real, impactful relationship with God today, a faith that is imprinted on our hearts and minds and a faith that we intentionally pass on to the next generation. Perhaps the best thing you can do to help your children grow their faith is to have a real and meaningful relationship with God yourself first.

As parents and families, you are the first witnesses of God’s love in your children’s lives. The Christian faith we pass along isn’t just about one hour on Sunday mornings or occasional prayers; it’s woven into the rhythms of our daily life as the Shema was for the Israelites. From the way we speak about forgiveness, to the way we serve others and treat others, to how we handle challenges with prayer and trust in God—It’s about creating a home where Christ is a member of that household. When we make faith a lived experience, not just a lesson, we give our children the most powerful foundation they could ever have—a relationship with Jesus Christ that can guide them through life’s storms. These are the lessons our children will carry with them long after they leave our home.

Let me take you back to the statistics. It’s not all bad news. Years after that 2007 study, The National Study of Youth and Religion found that 82% of children of Christian parents, who

walked the walk and talked the talk, who considered their beliefs to be very important, and who participated in church life and ministry found that their kids remained active in their faiths as young adults (Thomas, 17). 82% will maintain a life of faith after high school because of their Moms and Dads living out their own faith. That is a more hopeful statistic than hearing that two-thirds of our kids will leave the church and their faith.

Parents, and extended family members you are, hands down, the most influential people in your children's lives. Your words and actions matter the most to your children because they are watching you. They are watching to see how you are living your life, and how you are handling difficulty. They are seeing what you do with your generosity, and who you turn to when life gets hard; who you thank when life goes your way. How you relate to God matters to your children. You are the primary influencers that cultivate their young faith.

After that grade one teacher stopped me in my tracks to ask if I knew whether my primary school aged children had lives of faith of their own or not, Marcella and I knew we needed to make changes. But how were we going to fit all of this in? Thankfully, when we started to embrace our spiritual responsibility where "we could do it", there was someone who was also there to help!"—our church community! Like The Home Depot, our church sought to empower us to develop faith at home by coming alongside us.

We started small. We needed to ramp up our own spiritual life. First, we joined a life group. I also joined and eventually led a mens' group, and Marcella joined the church's women's group. I'm not sharing this to push you into these things, but I will say that when we carved out intentional time for our own faith lives, Jesus' stuff began spilling into our daily living and our family rhythms. In whatever you might decide to try, my encouragement to you again is to start small, and begin to build an influential faith from the inside-out. You can do this no matter what age your kids are as well. Start small. Let me say that again. Start small!

Just two weeks ago, we completed a short-term life group hosted here on Sunday evenings from 5:00 - 6:30 pm. A number of families from our church came for a 4 week long group titled *Family Discipleship 101*. We began the evening with dinner together - parents came with their kids and we had fellowship with food. After the meal was done, Jenn, our St. Catharines Kids' Pastor, took the kids and some volunteers to run a program called Godly Play. There, Jenn would tell various Bible stories to the kids, where they were engaged in interactive play that had to do with each story. It was awesome! The parents would stay with me, and we watched a set of videos produced by author and pastor Christie Thomas. These led to teaching and encouragements to help incorporate God into the small habits we already do around the house like getting up, brushing our teeth, having breakfast, and more. The parents not only had chances to discuss what we learned, but they were encouraged to make little tries each week of small ways that God could be brought into their daily living, little by little. I loved this group! I was so encouraged by the parents' commitment to give things a try, in order to become the people God has called them to be as the most influential people in their children's life of faith.

And as a church, particularly our Family Ministry, we were able to come alongside them, to support both the parents and their kids, so they all get a better chance to grow closer to Jesus. We will host the same short term life group again in the fall. I encourage you to sign up and join in when we launch it again later this year! If that feels too far away, let me recommend Christie Thomas' book *Little Habits, Big Faith: How Simple Practices Help Your Family Grow in Jesus*. (show book) It is a very practical read that helps you see that you can make small changes to your already busy life, without adding time you don't have, in order to build habits of faith for your family and you can do this starting right away. You can do it; we can help!

At this point, I realize that many of you might not feel this message is for you, because you don't see yourself as a parent or someone directly responsible for kids. So, let's talk about the "we can help" part of the Home Depot phrase for our church community. The "we" includes everyone in our church, whether we're parents or not, whether you have no kids, little kids at home, or your children are long grown up and out of the house. Some of you might desire to have kids but you have not been able to fulfil that dream. Others may be grieving the loss of a child, be it because of a death or because they are so distant these days. I want to say that we are all invited by God to pass along our lives of faith to the next generation. We are all invited to be spiritual parents to the kids and youth of our church and beyond. The Shema is something we can also take part in by working to strengthen our own relationship with God to seize the opportunity to share our faith with people who are younger than us.

Our kids' ministry program exists to support families in helping our kids know and love Jesus. And the volunteers on our Sunday morning ministry teams are working hard to teach a curriculum that supports what parents are learning here, so that when you pass along your life and faith with your kids, you have the support of your church behind you. As a ministry, we are helping you take small steps to experience God's love so the work our volunteers do really does matter.

So, in trying to embrace a "You can do it! We can help!" partnership with parents to raise families of faith, please hear me when I say, we need your help Southridge! As a Family Ministry, we rely on dozens of volunteers to do what only they can do to help parents grow in Jesus and to have the support they need for helping their kids grow to love Him too. Your wisdom, your passion, your patience, your joy, your laughter matters to the kids of our church, and so it matters to their parents too! Our volunteer team members are unbelievable in how they work so hard to ensure that week in and week out, we are offering the best program we can for the kids of our church. It is a real joy to be able to partner with the kids to support the parents of our church as they lead the charge to help their kids take hold of their faith. We need more of you to be involved, so today after this service, the kids' pastors in your location have asked for some of our volunteer team members to stick around after the service to share with you what it is like to serve in our ministry—to help out in the nursery, jr. kids, sr. kids, jr. youth and sr. youth.

When the service is over, please make your way to chat with one of our faithful volunteers to hear about the impact they have been able to make as they too support parents by helping kids

know Jesus a little more each time they serve. Moms and Dads, we would love your help if you can fit it in as well. Your gifts matter to our church and we have all kinds of needs to fill, whether that is in checking kids in before a service or teaching a lesson or holding a baby. There is room for you to find a role to help our kids grow in Christ.

Next week, we are also hosting some special events to support you in getting involved. We will have shadow shifts set up in kids' ministry, where you can join in with our volunteers, to observe what is happening and what it would look like for you to be a volunteer as well. Then, after the service on May 4th you can join your location's kids' pastor to walk you through everything it takes to get signed up to volunteer at Southridge. Over a pizza lunch that we will provide, we will take care of your kids' ministry application, your online police check, and walk you through completing our kids' protection program we call Southridge Cares. By the end of that time together after church, you could have everything already in the works to help you get set up to volunteer so you too can soon support the families of our church. It would be an honour to have you join our volunteer teams here at church. So, we hope you'll stick around after today's service to meet some of our volunteers. And we hope you'll join us for a shadow shift and pizza lunch, plus some paperwork, next week Sunday.

I want to share a story about some dads from our Welland location, who made a very intentional decision to pass along a life of faith to their young sons. When their sons were middle schoolers, these dads felt called to invest more in the spiritual lives of their sons to help them become men of God. Here is Corbyn Stade on the screen to share a few minutes of this journey with you.

Our church is here to support you. We know that kids have learned about faith in God for generations without punchy videos and dancy worship songs, or veggie snacks or Arrowroot cookies because families have been the ones who passed along the importance of knowing and loving God, for generations and generations. but those kinds of programs we offer do help kids have a sticky kind of faith that resonates when families share together the love of Jesus Christ. Today, we want to invite you into that partnership.

Start small. Don't take on too much all at once. You wouldn't teach kids the complicated theories or equations of mathematics without first teaching kids about numbers. Similarly, you can start small and bring God into the places you already spend time. When it is time for bedtime story, read one from the kids' Bibles Southridge has given you. When it is time to eat, say a quick prayer thanking God for the food. When it is time to clean up the house, play some simple worship that draws everyone's minds to Jesus. Marcella blares worship music to help soften her heart before God for having to live with a couple of gross men like Liam and me. We want to invite you to partner with our church's Family Ministry programs, especially on Sundays, and let our kids' volunteers fulfill their calling to support parents and families who are the ones with the highest calling of passing along a life of faith to give their kids the best chances they can have to embrace a lifelong relationship with Jesus.

When all of us, as the church, partner together with families to raise the next generation, everyone wins! Parents, you can do it, and Southridge, we can help!

Let's Pray.