

HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH

II Timothy 1:3-7

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As speaker and author, Tony Campolo, tells the story, it happened during a sophisticated academic gathering at the University of Pennsylvania which neither he nor his wife wanted to attend. During their mixing among the faculty, a sociology professor came up to Mrs. Campolo and said, "What do you do for a living?" Mrs. Campolo, feeling the compelling task of raising children, gave this reply, "I am socializing two homosapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation. And what, may I ask, do you do for a living?"

When it comes to core beliefs and foundational values, what happens at your house is more important than what happens at the White House. In the close quarters of family life we learn to honor God and respect ourselves. In the daily routines of our relational lives we develop a standard by which we interact with human beings everywhere. Day by day we form the habits, set the priorities, and give the impressions that will go with us to the grave.

If the Lord is going to find faith on the earth when he returns, it will depend, in a large degree, on how we do in our relationships with one another. On this Mother's Day I'd like to talk for a few minutes about building a household of faith. How can you do it? Let me suggest some ways.

WE CAN BECOME FAITHFUL DISCIPLES.

In the little town of Lystra, a middle-aged missionary by the name of Paul and a teen-ager by the name of Timothy struck up a friendship that lasted for a lifetime. Timothy's dad was not a believer but his grandmother and his mother were. Their faith along with Paul's friendship shaped this lively leader for the early church.

In a tender letter, the second one that he wrote to his friend Timothy, Paul writes these words from a prison cell, *I am reminded of your sincere faith which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now is also alive in you.*

I would like for you to think for just a moment about the word *sincere* faith. It is sincere faith that stands the test of time. The word literally translated is to be unwaxed, non-touched up. To be sincere is to be genuine, real, earnest, honest, heartfelt, natural. The kind of faith that other people need from you and me is authentic spirituality. What your sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews need from you most is an authentic faith.

What people ought to be able to expect from the Church is sincere faith. The tragedies of the Church being revealed through the media today is not simply activities of employees who take unlawful advantage of children but a demoralizing betrayal of the trust that cuts at the core of the faith. There is a double sin when the Church sins—the act itself and the loss of trust that is brought to the community. The foundation of faith is trust. If parents, clergy, and the Church cannot be trusted, will the Son of Man find faith when he returns to the earth?

Of course, there are grandmothers like Lois, mothers like Eunice, Sunday School teachers like you, and youth counselors like you who can be trusted. In the simple activities of life they make all the difference in the shaping and the formation of a life.

David Alshire writes, I don't remember a single lesson that Shirley Knapp taught me, but I do remember the word of life that she lived. Her smile and warmth told me Sunday after Sunday, "I care about you and Jesus loves you." I don't remember more than one thing that Louis Belek, who was my youth Sunday School teacher, said. In fact, the one thing I remember I no longer agree with in terms of his perspective, but I remember Louis. He cared about me in my struggling years of adolescence when I tried to find my direction. In fact, Laura and Owen Faris never said much of anything. They just showed up at my house on Sunday morning, let me ride to church with them, and then bring me back home after church was over. They didn't have to say a word. Their very actions, their care, their love, and their openheartedness spoke volumes about the nature of God. When it comes to building a household of faith the very best thing you and I can give to anybody else on this earth is our own faithfulness.

WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH.

We can make a deliberate choice about the God of our lives. In the Old Testament at a place called Shechem, Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, called a national assembly. In his last speech as their leader, Joshua urges them to make a clear choice. *Choose this day whom you will serve, the God of your forefathers or the gods of the Amorites in whose land we are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

Have you made that choice? What god is worshipped at your house? Is it the god of materialism whose worship is the latest gadget? Is it the god of sport whose worship is the winning team? Is it the god of hedonism who can hardly wait for the next vacation? Is it the god of workaholicism who sells his soul to the company store?

You see, everybody serves somebody. It might be the devil, it might be greed, it might be your kids, it might even be me, but I'm going to serve somebody. The choice we have as human beings, as responsible adult human beings, is that we can choose our gods and I urge you to choose your God well.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. It hung on a tiny little plaque in the little five-room house where I was raised. It had silver lettering against a blue velvet background. As a decoration it was worthless; as a declaration it was priceless. Christ is the Head of this house.

What that meant was that God was worshipped. What that meant was that The Commandments were kept. We didn't argue about posting them. We knew them in our hearts and we obeyed them. What that meant was that the scriptures were read. What that meant was that people were respected. The God you choose determines the life you live, so be careful who you crown as Lord.

Barbara Bush wrote, "George and I have been two of the luckiest people in all the world and when all the dust settles and all the crowds are gone, there are only three things that matter in life— my faith, my family, and my friends." Does faith matter at your house?

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? The answer to that question is in your hands and my hands. We can become faithful disciples ourselves. We can make a choice, a deliberate active decision, as a family that God will be honored in this place.

WE CAN CULTIVATE HOLY HABITS.

It may only take a spark to get the fire going, but it is going to take some wood to keep it burning. And so, Paul writes to his young friend, Timothy, *fan the flame that is within you. Stir up the gift that is there. Jesus would say, if you want to keep your lamp burning you better put some oil in it.* There are some means and activities by which we can keep the flame of faith burning in our lives. They are simple things really. It is like deciding as a family to worship God.

If church were just a matter of sermons, you could get more effective ones on the Internet. If church were just a matter of music, you could listen to surround sound in your home. If church were just a matter of entertainment, you could go to a concert. But church is a matter of meeting God. It is a divine encounter. By regularly getting out of bed and coming to church, we put our faith in God who is faithful to us. Sometimes it means sacrifice and every Sunday you make a choice of priorities. Every person here had at least ten, fifteen, twenty other things you could have done this morning, but you made a choice to be in this pew. Thank you for doing that.

Don't ever forget, my friends, what you do speaks volumes about your values. And furthermore, it may be the only hour of the week when you happen to be together with your family—when you're not running, not working, not trying to get to the next ball game. But here you are, just sitting still side by side in the presence of God. Don't underestimate what God might choose to do through you right now.

We can decide to tell the stories and retell them again and again. Reba McIntyre

tells the story about going fishing with her grandmother. She said, “My grandmother would take me fishing at a little pond on her place. We would throw out the lines and never look at them again because Grandma would get to telling me some story. Almost always they were stories out of the Bible. At the pond bank, I learned the stories about Moses and Daniel. She told me about David who was a songwriter and who knew how to play a harp, who became a famous person. She began to weave that into my mind. In fact, I probably learned more about the Bible from my grandmother on the bank of the pond than I did in Sunday School on Sunday.” Tell the stories! Tell them again and again and again and again.

And do something else. Teach your children how to pray because you need them to pray for you. Our grandson, who will be three next month, was here last weekend. He climbed up in his chair and took his grandmother’s hand to say the blessing. He said, “Thank you God for Poppy, for MeMe, for Momma, for Daddy and for the chance for us to be together.” I want to tell you, I have prayed a lot of prayers in a lot of places and many of you are praying for me, for which I am deeply grateful. But I am doubly, doubly grateful that my son and daughter-in-law are teaching my little grandson how to pray for his granddaddy. You see, his granddaddy needs it.

You can cultivate holy habits. You can go to church together as a family. You can tell the stories. You can teach them to pray. You can render acts of service together. Some little kids who had gotten out of Sunday School and were driving past the stoplight on Old Hickory Boulevard saw a man standing by the side of the road. You have seen him with the sign— Homeless, Will Work for Food.

They wanted to do something; they had just learned about the Good Samaritan. Their mother was very cautious and rightly so. She said to them, “But don’t you understand, if we give him money he will probably use it on things that are not healthful to him. Most likely he’s addicted. We can’t give him cash.” But, they said, “We’ve got to do something; we learned about it in Sunday School. You don’t pass people by.”

When you turn young, creative minds loose, they come up with all kinds of ideas, better than the rest of us. They said, “We’ve got an answer. We’ll pack a lunch box in the back of our car and every time we go past that stoplight and that man is there, we’ll roll down the window and give him a sandwich and something to drink. We’ll be smart but we’ll also be caring.” Teach your children well.

WE CAN TRUST OUR FAMILIES TO THE LORD.

One other thing you can do. You can trust your family to the Lord. Ultimately it is all surrender, my friends. That’s where it is. When Samuel was born to Hannah, she offered this prayer. *“My heart rejoices in the Lord. I prayed for this child and God has given me what I asked. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life, he will be given to the Lord.”* Have you trusted those you love the most to God’s care?

About two years ago I got a phone call from the person who was the pastor of my church when I was five years old. He lives in California. I had not heard from him in years, and had only seen him once or twice in my adult life. But, my name was circulating through the denomination and he called me. He said, "Howard, there is something you need to know. One night at the altar of your home church, your mother said to me, 'I have received a revelation from the Lord. My youngest son will be a minister of the gospel.' That night, unknown to you, your future was placed in God's hands." She never said that to me, I never knew that.

I thought, at the ripe old age of 18, when I chose to listen to the calling of God, it was all my decision. I thought, at forty, when I went through that mid-life transition that some of you know about and struggle with, when you decide to go or stay, that staying was my decision. I thought the choices I have made about where I am going to be, what I am going to do, and what route I am going to follow had been my decisions, my choosing. Suddenly, one day over the telephone, I discovered something that I didn't know and that she would never, ever be able to tell me. Somehow, when I thought I was deciding it all, to stay or to go, what I didn't know was that it had all been decided a long time ago. When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask her, "How could you have been so certain so long ago?"

A household of faith. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Oh, I hope so. I really, really hope so. Amen.

