

Parents-in-Training

Growing Disciples
from the Ground Up

MARK HALL, LEAD SINGER OF CASTING CROWNS AND YOUTH PASTOR OF EAGLES LANDING BAPTIST CHURCH

If a true-to-life job description for a parent existed, the globe just might be half empty. However every day, millions of people, without an application, resumé, cover letter, references, letters of recommendation, a degree, or experience, accept and take on what is quite possibly the most difficult job in the world: parent. So why do people become parents? Because they desire to give their care and love to another human being, because it's thrust upon them, because it's rewarding, maybe even because they recognize that it's part of God's plan. Whatever the reasons, as varied and numerous as they may be, people who choose the parenting role often quickly find that even if such a job description existed, it could never do justice to the true challenge of accepting and assuming the charge of another human being.

Increasingly, people other than those with a biological claim over a child are assuming the job of parent for many reasons. While plenty of biological moms and dads are doing their jobs, grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, distant and not-so-distant relatives, adoptive parents, foster parents, and others are stepping in when birth parents are absent or uninvolved. Also topping off the who-

will-parent/how-to-parent stress is the ever-increasing list of issues children and teens face in their daily lives.

"With shipwrecked
faith, the idols rise.
We do what's right
in our own eyes. Our
children now will pay
the price. We need
Your light, we need
Your light."

"IF WE'VE EVER NEEDED YOU" FROM
UNTIL THE WHOLE WORLD HEARS

You see, all this effort centers around one strategic God-sized mission: For parents to make disciples out of their children, teaching and guiding them to become the godly men and women with hearts after Jesus that God desires for them to be. Bottom line: the responsibility of a parent is hard and full of questions, and this reality is a common thread running through many of the families that make up the local church body.

So, what to do?

Well, if 18 years of leading youth in the local church have made one fact clear, it is that to reach and make disciples of the up-and-coming generations—children and teens—local church pastors and leaders must make an effort to reach whole families or, more specifically, parents. And one of the best ways to begin reaching parents is to open up the lines of communication. Simply put: get them talking.

At Eagles Landing Baptist Church (near Atlanta, Georgia), not only do several parents of the students in the youth group attend the youth services with their children, but many of them also come to special parents' dinners we have every six weeks. Over food and fellowship we try to help parents understand that youth ministry is family ministry, because to reach the teenager you have to reach the family and not discriminate as to whether the "parent" fits in the traditional category.

We have a dinner; but your church might set up a Sunday school class, a Bible study series, a network of small groups, a parents' retreat, a special seminar, or maybe just an ice cream social. Whatever venue works best for your church, the idea is to create an atmosphere where parents can

come together with each other and realize they aren't the only ones who feel like parenting is about to make them lose their minds.

“To know You is to catch my brother when he is falling. To know You is to feel the pain of the Brokenhearted. ‘Cause they can't live without You.”

“TO KNOW YOU” FROM UNTIL THE WHOLE WORLD HEARS

Parents should feel like they can talk about the different problems they are having, and they don't have to act like everything is great. Transparency, candor and a willingness to admit that they don't have it all together are key. The community building we have seen and the “fellowship of suffering” they are all going through has created some friendships outside of the dinner, which is an important goal.

During these dinners we talk about specific student issues, finding out what parents know, or think they know, about their children. We also let them in on what is truly going on in their children's lives. We hit the big topics, such as what teens

are actually doing with Facebook, MySpace, cell phone technology (i.e. sexting and text bullying), which are important examples of things that need to be talked about in this digital age. We also discuss the different ways parents handle discipline and let them in on what their children are saying about it. What works? What doesn't?

We want them to know that God does talk about parenting—and it's relevant to the 21st century issues they face. It's not about lecturing them as much as it is about starting a dialogue and putting resources, such as books and Web sites, in their hands. We give them things they can take home and soak in. We want them to know that God desires a relationship with them. We want their kids to know and pursue Him, too. He wants to give parents a solid plan for rearing, teaching, and guiding their children onto the right path—both in the practical, the “stuff” going on in their daily lives, and the spiritual—their relationships with Jesus.

Pastors and leaders, get the parents in your church family together and get them talking. Let them know they are not in this alone. 💡

Besides being the lead singer of Grammy and multi-Dove award-winning worship band Casting Crowns, **MARK HALL** has been a youth pastor for 18 years, eight of which have been at Eagles Landing Baptist Church, near Atlanta, Georgia, where four of the members of Casting Crowns serve as the worship band. He and wife Melanie have 3 children: John Michael (11), Reagan (9), Zoe (6). For more band info, log on to castingcrowns.com.

➔ RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



Parent Fuel

Gives parents the tools they need to connect with their kids heart-to-heart and equips them to fuel a fire for Christ in their kids. Paper. 271 pages.

03LK0157. \$12.99

Parent Fuel DVDs

This six-session highly interactive DVD series inspires and motivates. It features Dr. Barry St. Clair and a variety of parents expressing their struggles and successes in parenting their kids, along with time for small group discussion. Each 55 minute video enhances the message of Parent Fuel to parents in your church, small group, school, or neighborhood.

DVDs. 26LK0356. \$89.99



Use Technology to Build a Relationship With Your Kids

Emailing your children can open dialogue you might not have otherwise. The same is true for using text messages on a cell phone. Kids today love to communicate using technology. You can join in the communication by understanding how the various tools work and then using them to interact with your kids. Keep in mind that technology can't take the place of personal face-to-face contact with your children. Take your child out for ice cream or sit on the couch and talk. The Internet has a lot of advantages in our society, but nothing takes the place of spending time together.

LEADER TIP: Send out a weekly email to the kids in your ministry reminding them of upcoming events and the week's memory verse. You can even invite them to respond with questions or ways they are applying the week's lesson.



Tip from "Seven Essentials to Keep Kids Safe Online, Part 1." For the rest of the article go to discipleshipideas.com.

DISCIPLESHIP SET TO MUSIC WITH *Casting Crowns*

“If We Ever Needed You” from *Until the Whole World Hears*

This song really points out our need and the realization that we are living in hard times. As families, as schools, as churches, as a country, if we have ever needed Him, it's now, and it's starting with us—with parents, with adults. The lyrics in the second half of the first verse are: “*With shipwrecked faith, the idols rise / We do what is right in our own eyes / Our children now will pay the price / We need Your light, Lord, shine Your light.*” Our kids aren't going to help grow us spiritually, most likely. It has to start with us.



To listen to tracks from *Until the Whole World Hears* and learn more about Casting Crowns, visit castingcrowns.com.