

The Pathway to Sticky Faith in a Pull-Apart World

Do you want the children you influence to have real faith that sticks throughout their teenage years and beyond? Can you recognize what is pulling them away from that? We live in a pull-apart world. Many teens who were raised in church homes walk away from their faith when they leave home to go to college or beyond. I know you do not want that. To stay on the pathway to sticky faith, you have to make choices for yourself and for them. Here are some choices you can make in four areas of life that everyone shares.

THE PATHWAY

Ron and I met at LSU, married, then moved to Texas to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. We stayed in Texas to raise our 3 children and minister in our churches. After seminary, Ron ran a wilderness camping ministry for 20 years. When you go to a wilderness, you have to prepare for hiking selected trails. You choose the trail you want to take and must follow the trail markers so that you can stick to the right trail to get to the right destination. That is called a pathway.

Pathway = a way of achieving a desired result; a course of action

For a follower of Christ, what is the desired result? It would be to stay faithful to Christ yourself for your whole life. If you are a parent or influencer of children, the desired result would be that those children would trust in Christ for their salvation and have real faith that sticks throughout their teenage years and beyond. You want them to have “sticky faith.”

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CHOICES ON THE PATHWAY

In the Bible, a man named Joshua talked about choices to follow a pathway to sticky faith.

CHOOSE for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for ME and MY HOUSEHOLD, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

Notice the choices:

- **Choose for yourself whom you will serve.** There are two different ways of approaching life—God’s way or the world’s way. The two are not compatible.
- **Choose for your household.** You have the authority to make the choices for the children in your household.

When it comes to children, there are no guaranteed results like you would have in a science activity mixing vinegar and baking soda—fizzy explosion every time. You are dealing with human beings. For some of you reading this, the fathers of your children are not believers or may not be on board with spiritual things. Yet, you can still choose for yourself whom you will serve, and you can plan how to influence your children.

Ron and I were fairly new Christians when we got married. We wanted that kind of sticky faith for ourselves and our future family. We studied the Scriptures and formed some basic convictions that became a pathway for our family, not that we ever sat down and drew it out. Several years ago, we asked our adult children who have “sticky faith” what they thought we did right to encourage their walk of faith while growing up and to prepare them to be Christian adults. They already tell us what we did

wrong! Our children responded by email, listing what really mattered to them. It was nice to read what we did right.

Their answers confirmed that we stayed true to our convictions in **four** areas of life that everyone reading this blog shares. They were like trail markers on a chosen hiking trail that helped us plan and make decisions about what we allowed into our family life. The four trail markers are: 1) Christ-focused learning; 2) The family team; 3) Local church commitment; and 4) Godly mentors and friends. Let's go hiking together. Got your hiking shoes on?

TRAIL MARKER #1. CHRIST-FOCUSED LEARNING

What is Christ-focused learning? Let us start with the basic foundation. Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle, rules of conduct, or an organization. It is about a relationship with Jesus who is Christ the Lord.

Therefore, Christ-focused learning is about loving Jesus and His way of approaching life. It is not just Bible facts and stories but a relationship with Jesus as someone real and worth knowing. Christ-focused learning starts with you. You need to be Christ-focused yourself, trusting Him, obeying Him, and believing that He loves you dearly and your children too.

Your own relationship with Jesus should be so much a part of your life and so much a part of your home that your children cannot miss it. You want it to be contagious so they will catch it and be excited about catching it!

When you decide that you want to approach life God's way rather than the world's way, you are making a pre-decision. I love that word pre-decision. It means you already have a conviction about something. When options come flying in your face, you already know you are going to do it or not going to do it. Pre-decisions help you stay on the pathway to sticky faith. That is true with Christ-focused learning for your children.

On our pathway to sticky faith, we will cross 7 bridges related to Christ-focused learning. Most of these are covered in our "Joyful Walk" blog series and *Pathway to a Joyful Walk Bible Study*.

Bridge 1 — Loving Jesus

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

Children come out of the womb wanting to love Jesus. Your role is to nurture that love. You do that through your own example and through training done at home. The local church is to assist you but not take your place.

Bridge 2 — Wanting that relationship with Jesus

You want your children to recognize themselves as sinners and trust in Jesus Christ for their own salvation. That is the best thing. You can influence that but you cannot control it. You should not force it. Once they trust Christ, you then have an advocate—God's Spirit—working from the inside on their hearts and minds while you are working on the outside.

Bridge 3 — Loving His Word

I did not get any real Bible teaching for the first nineteen years of my life. I was unprepared for the onslaught of anti-God messages when I got to college. Thankfully, in my sophomore year of college, the Holy Spirit swept through the LSU band and drew many band members to Christ, including me. Then, I was invited to attend a small group Bible study on campus. My eyes were opened as I was drawn to Christ through the riches of His Word. I made a pre-decision that Christ-focused learning would be a priority for me and any future home.

Knowing Christ and the truth of God in His Word had priority. We made Bible study and Bible memory work part of their daily routine, as important as school work. When our children were in AWANA, we worked on their verses when they got home from school then did homework. We tried not to let it be last in the day when everyone was tired. That is a message you send about the importance of God's Word in your home. Is it a priority for you? Are you planning for it?

Bridge 4 — Knowing Their Identity in Christ

Once they become Christians, teach them about their identity in Christ (a dearly loved child of God, one of God's saints) and how the Holy Spirit lives inside them to help them live to please God. Reinforce this concept as soon as they are old enough to grasp it.

Bridge 5 — Understanding God's grace

When you understand God's grace for you, then you are motivated to obey God because of love and gratitude for what He has done for you. This is **contagious** so those watching will be motivated to love God and be grateful to Him and want to obey Him also. Live out God's grace in your life.

Bridge 6 — Pushing them towards dependence on Christ

Human parents raise their children to be less dependent on them and more independent of them. But God raises His children to be less independent of Him and more dependent on Him.

Dependence on the Lord leads to obedience to the Lord out of love and gratitude for what He has done for you and them.

You have to encourage this gradual transfer of dependence from you to Christ. You want them to be accountable to Christ as Lord of their lives, not themselves or their peers. Lead them to be Christ-focused themselves. That is the best kind of stickiness for sticky faith.

Bridge 7 — Leading them to mature faith of their own

A young child's faith is extension of parents' faith. Somewhere in their teen or young adult year, they have to make it their own. They will hopefully make a conscious decision to follow Christ as His disciple. For our children, I noticed that this decision happened at different times for each of them ranging from early teens to early twenties.

Those seven bridges are positive things leading to sticky faith. Having Christ-focused parents with Christ-focused learning in the home is important. That was the first trail marker that kept us on the pathway to sticky faith.

TRAIL MARKER #2. THE FAMILY TEAM

When hiking with a group, how important is it to stay together? What can happen if one gets far ahead or one lags behind? Ron's trail rule was this: **stay within sight and sound of the group.**

This trail marker refers to the hiking group known as your family. The family is God's idea. He uses it to shape us. It is important to stay focused on the common good of your family, like a team. What is best for the family team?

Team Community: Inside the home

The family team works together for the common good. Our family practiced serving one another: One of my favorite sayings was that **chores are opportunities to serve one another in love.** When you do chores, you are serving the family team.

We also practiced sharing with one another. We shared cars, computer time, and money. We shared hard times together—times of real financial need when we prayed for God to provide food for us. Our children saw that and saw how God answered. They also used their money to pay for gasoline and food for the family.

Team Activities: Outside the home

Our emphasis on team community affected our choice of activities outside of the home also. Activities can be beneficial to the family team, OR they can rob the family of its energy and detract the family team from its purpose of living to serve Jesus and please Him with your lives.

What are you allowing to take your family time? Does that fit your purpose for the whole family?

As much as possible, we tried to evaluate outside activities based on how they would affect the family unit. Some things were for a short time.

Think beyond the child years. What kind of adults do you want them to be? Focus your family activities on that. Leave time open in your schedule to do those kinds of things, especially what it looks like to serve Jesus. There is plenty of room for creativity. Some of our favorite activities were service activities. We joined another family to vacuum and set out chairs in the church auditorium on Saturday nights once every three months then went out for ice cream together. Another time, the children and I did weekly housecleaning for a bedridden pregnant mom. Afterwards, we went to get Slurpees. Make sure your team activities have a purpose that keeps your family team on the pathway to sticky faith.

TRAIL MARKER #3. LOCAL CHURCH COMMITMENT

A good Christ-focused, Bible teaching local church is like having a good map with you to follow on your pathway. A good map teaches truth about your trail—the bends and turns, ups and downs—and prepares you for the challenges ahead. Being committed to your local church will help you and your children stay on the pathway to sticky faith.

Benefits of local church commitment

Here are two of many benefits of commitment to a local church:

- Your children will get disciplined by others besides you. Assess what is available and take advantage of it to supplement what they are getting at home.
- Your children can also learn how to disciple others as they get older which makes them more dependent on Christ for themselves.

Local church commitment was a pre-decision we made. So, we planned for regular attendance of worship services and children's classes. Every Sunday was a worship day. The children were expected to get ready in time to go all the way through high school. "Our family does this." We had the freedom to make exceptions for traveling, sickness, and a few other things.

Challenges to local church commitment

The problem in today's culture is that families are continually pulled apart from local church commitment. Other trails sound more alluring—sports, dance, recreation, and other award-oriented activities.

Hebrews 10:25 talks about local church commitment. I looked at this verse in several translations.

not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, (NIV)

not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, (CSB)

not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, (NET)

Giving up, neglecting, abandoning—those are intentional choices. They usually don't just happen. They can become habits. That is choosing to serve yourself or the culture instead of the Lord.

If you have made the pre-decision that consistent church involvement is essential to your child's spiritual growth and your own, that will show up in the choices you make regarding activities that will pull you away. Sports teams are one of the biggest competitions to the local church in our area. You can choose to say "No!" to those alluring trails and not give up, neglect, and abandon weekly worshipping together as a family. You can dare to be different from the world.

What has lasting value? Keep in mind the long-term goal of life beyond childhood. You want sticky faith into adulthood. Model church commitment to them so that commitment will continue beyond life in your household.

Local church commitment keeps you on the pathway and will help to influence sticky faith in your kids. And the local church is a great source of godly mentors and friends.

TRAIL MARKER #4. GODLY MENTORS AND FRIENDS

This would be interacting with others who are following the same pathway as you are following. Surround your children with God-fearing people.

Surround children with God-fearing adults

Our blood relatives were 7 hours away, so our local church became our family. We got together with other Christian families in many different ways. We went on week-long backpacking trips with another Christian family. You cannot hide much on a backpacking trip. Our children got to see how another Christian family loved and served one another.

Classroom teachers and small group leaders can have lifelong impacts. We saw the huge impact on our son of one Sunday School teacher who was passionately in love with God. Over that year, I watched our son develop a love for God he did not have the year before and one he has continued to have ever since. He still remembers her influence on him. Godly mentors build into their lives.

Be choosy about your children's friends

Children need your guidance in choosing friends. You need to seek out and initiate contact with quality friends for your kids. Don't depend on the neighborhood or the school to be the source of quality friends for them. In your church, seek out other Christian families who love Jesus and His way of approaching life. As your children whom they like in their church classes. Be proactive in initiating contact. For years, I drove for miles to bring home the right friends for our children to enjoy. It was well worth the time spent in the car and the planning.

Surround your children with people of all age groups who love Jesus wholeheartedly. Godly mentors and friends are a great support to parents.

HIKING ON THAT PATHWAY TO STICKY FAITH

We did not do everything right. There are lots of things we would go back and change based on what we now know. But we would not change the pathway and trail markers we followed for ourselves and our family.

You and I know we can influence children in the right direction, but each child must still respond to Jesus' call on his or her life individually. So, keep moving forward. Trust in Jesus to help you do your part. Trust that He will do His part to draw them to Himself. Those are the two aspects of trusting God.

Once a child trusts in Christ as Savior, God's Holy Spirit moves inside to impact that child from the inside out for the rest of his or her life!

And lead them to be dependent on Him. That is the best influence for "sticky faith"!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How are you staying on the pathway to sticky faith in these four areas ...
 - Christ-focused learning?
 - The family team?
 - Local church commitment?
 - Godly mentors and friends?
2. What will you ask God to do to help you and your household stay on the pathway to sticky faith?

Prayer: Ask Christ to capture the heart of your child as He has already captured your heart. Then, depend on Jesus to help do your part and leave the rest up to Him. Watch what He does!