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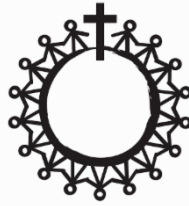
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AT HOME

- * When your children do precisely what they should do ... tell them! Catch them doing the right thing or doing better. Affirm. Celebrate.
- * Within earshot, brag about them. Tell your mom or neighbor or friend. Let them overhear you.
- * When it hasn't been a good day, be their "rearview mirror." Remind them of a time when they did it well. Retell the good stories.
- * When they have stumbled, be their "telescope," predicting that very soon, they will consistently do what you know they can do.



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PLAYING CATCH

"There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

--Thomas Merton

Those of you who know me well, know it is highly unlikely that I am writing a post about playing catch with a ball. And, you are so right!

We are already well into the political season of playing a very different kind of "catch." Catch politicians' verbal missteps, misstatements, mistakes. Catch lies and half-truths. Catch verbal asides, when candidates assume the mic is off. Catch unflattering photos. Catch compromising situations. But this is most certainly not the kind of "catch" I am advocating either!

I am going to encourage each of us to play a very different kind of "catch" today ... and every day! This one is counter-intuitive, counter-cultural, and may earn you some derogatory names - "sucker," "sap," even "Jesus follower." Your assignment is to look for the very best in every child of God, to believe that change is possible, and to affirm every person who crosses your path.

To play, you need be on high alert at all times, scanning everyone you see, especially the ones you live with and work with, to "catch" them being all God created them to be - kind, tenderhearted, smart, honest, resourceful, compassionate, funny, brave, hard working, empathetic, loyal, courageous, and loving.

* Separate their behavior from their personhood. As a person, they are a child of God and nothing, nothing, nothing can change that. As for behavior, they can change and you are there to help them do just that.

* Remember, our kids become what we tell them they are. Choose your words very, very carefully.

* What gets attention, gets repeated. The goal of every behavior (and misbehavior) is to get attention. Positive or negative behavior. Positive or negative attention. So, before you give attention, make sure you want to see the behavior again. Otherwise, ignore. It'll drive them crazy. Just walk away. If you need to, wear earplugs.

* When people describe your child in unfair, unflattering ways, don't let others have the last word. Described your daughter as "aggressive"? You change it to "assertive." Described your son as "shy"? You change it to "observant and reflective." (This is not to cover unacceptable behavior, but to explain your child to others in a more positive light.)

* Take it to God in prayer, asking for forgiveness and a fresh start. This has already been promised to you in your baptism. Grab hold ... for dear life!

* When it really has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, tiptoe in and gaze at the sleeping face of your child and fall in love all over again.

* PS. These tips work well with adults, too!

AT CHURCH

* My ministry collaborator and dear friend, Lyle Griner has taught me - and thousands of others - to be a "gift namer." Look carefully at every child and youth and name

This will take every drop of your life energy. You will fall into bed exhausted every night, hearing Jesus whisper, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Because, that is precisely what you will be, God's faithful servant, who has looked with the eyes of Jesus, affirmed with the words of Jesus, loved with the love Jesus first lavished on us, reminding us to "love one another as I have loved you."

When I read one of Richard Rohr's daily meditations last week, I was captured by the quotation with which I began this post:

"There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

--Thomas Merton

It made me wonder: What might happen to the world if we live with eyes and hearts wide open, to catching others "shining like the sun" ... and tell them so? Today, I'm going to do just that!

Will you join me?

For a few ideas to get us started, both in our homes and in our congregations, read the sidebar on the left. Let me know what happens!

NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning where God is calling your congregation now, and engaging all to participate? This might be the time for coaching with Marilyn Sharpe, a ministry partner who will focus, inspire, and walk with you and your ministry team to follow where God is leading.

CALL OR EMAIL NOW!

It is not too early to

the gifts you see. Do it, looking them in the eye. Be serious. You may be the first adult who has taken this one seriously and found the unique gifts God has given them.

* Then, give them an opportunity to use those gifts in service to God's larger family. When young children sing in worship, it isn't "cute" or "entertaining." Thank them for leading you in worship.

* Invite children and youth to lead in worship every week, not just once a year for a "youth Sunday." Let

every Sunday be filled with the gifts of God for the people of God.

* Engage children and youth in cross+generational connections and service and leadership.

* Intentionally grow all as leaders, giving the training and mentoring they need to become all God has created them to be.

* Tell them they are necessary, that you need them. Give every one of them that message at least twice a year. (Thanks, Lyle. You taught me that one, too.)

* Take time to get to really know each child and youth. Remember what they tell you.

* Fred Rogers, Presbyterian minister and host of "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood," and my friend Pastor Mike Carlson, who just posted this on Facebook, get the last words:

"I believe that appreciation is a holy thing - that when we look for what's best in a person we happen to be with at the moment, we're doing what God does all the time. So in loving and appreciating our neighbor we're participating in something sacred."

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