



And a Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Advent and Event of Parenting as Spiritual Journey

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When I became a parent, I found myself stretched in many ways—physically, emotionally, socially, and not least of all, spiritually. I looked to my congregation for help and assistance with questions of faith and parenting, but initially I did not find what I was seeking. As time went on, I wondered if other new parents—who were clearly experiencing physical, emotional, and social changes similar to my own—might also be experiencing the spiritual questions I had encountered. Years later, I found myself working as a ministry professional who wanted to engage new parents in the life of the church, but found that task difficult. As a new parent, I hadn't known what questions to ask or where to begin to process what I was experiencing; as a ministry professional, I didn't know how to communicate the information I thought new parents ought to know in a way that was accessible and meaningful. I did not know how to “make accessible the traditions of the religious community” nor “make manifest the intrinsic connection between the tradition and transformation” (Boys 1989, 193).

Today we realize that parents have a clear role in nurturing the spiritual life of their children, but as ministry leaders we are often unsure how to nurture and guide the parents in this role. In order to learn how best to lead, I felt that I needed to listen deeply to men and women who have recently encountered this phase of life to see what spiritual or theological questions or experiences they might be facing. I wanted to hear how they were making meaning out of these experiences and where they turned to find answers.

The Conversations

Each parent that I spoke with had a unique story. Each one had been transformed in some way by becoming a parent, although not all of them equated this with a deepening of faith. Some of the transformations were personal, others were relational; some spoke of the transformation in the past tense, while others spoke of a

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change that was in process. Within these unique statements, however, they shared questions of identity, ability, and faith that they had been asking through this journey.

There were times that I was really excited and there were times when I weren't. I would lay in bed awake sometimes at night just kind of saying am I ready for this? Do I want this? I mean there wasn't anything I could do to change it, but I had to convince myself that it was good. (Donovan)

I think it's probably moments like [my child's illness] that you have more of a connection to God, when you have scary moments, just because at that point, who do you turn to? (Alan)

Questions such as these—Am I ready? Who do you turn to?—are not questions with simple answers. They express emotions and beliefs that lie at the very core of a person's existence; ones that require both self-reflection and relational support to explore and resolve. And yet, several of the parents that I spoke with shared that this was the first time that they had explored these questions with anyone, including self-reflection or conversation with their spouse or faith community. Once encountered, these questions drew each one of the participants to say that they had been changed in some way. Phoebe is a pastor who found herself learning through our conversation.

I feel like God saved me from myself. And I think that is the biggest thing I've learned—is that who I think I am, might not be who I really am. . . Yeah, I think it will be God working through being a parent. I mean, I just, I am very, very, dedicated to being the best mother I can be and discerning that and praying. That's my daily prayer—that I will be wise. (Phoebe)

Several parents being interviewed indicated that they were giving greater value to their faith through this event of parenting. Making new commitments to their own faith journey, as well as an attachment to the faith community, either became more important, or—for those who were already deeply involved—solidified. Becoming a parent appeared to give greater value to these parents' faith even if they could not actually attend worship due to fatigue or schedule, or had not considered this to be important prior to having children. Some chose new churches,

looking for communities that would provide programming for their children and/or support for themselves as parents. Others started paying closer attention to their own faith lives so that they would be prepared to answer their children's questions. These parents were hungry for conversations of meaning, although they most likely would not have asked for or initiated these conversations on their own. Congregations need to be communities of people who are intentional about initiating the faith conversations at key times of life and transition.

Matters of Language

How do parents describe their parenting experiences? As I was beginning this research, Annette Mahoney and Aaron Swank of Bowling Green University were completing the first round of their research on parenting and sanctification. For a portion of their survey instrument they used pairs of words and asked parents to rank their experience in term of these words. After their first round of research, Mahoney and Swank made the decision to adjust this scale because they realized that the pairs were neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor opposite of one another. For this reason, I made the decision not to duplicate this portion of their research as I originally intended; however, I wondered if this particular set of words would be used by the parents without prompting.

From the list of thirty words used in that research, only the following seven were found in the interviews I conducted: *blessed, rewarding, routine, mysterious, miraculous, awesome, and happy*. These words were not used as often nor by as many people as I had anticipated. So, if parents in this sample didn't use the words that the Bowling Green University group gathered—a list, I might add, that contains many words that we might well hear in a typical church service or class—what words did they utilize?

One of the words that these parents used often was **balance**. Six respondents used this word a total of fourteen times as they described trying to find equilibrium in their new lives as parents, or in what they hoped that faith would provide for their children. Between the lack of sleep, needing to work, and navigating the learning curve on what it meant to be a parent, these adults found themselves renegotiating their life partnerships, work commitments, and other parts of life that may have

previously seemed stable. A second use of the word balance had to do with providing the children with a rounded education—something that attended to their spiritual needs. The parents weren't always sure what those needs might be, or how they would know if they were being met, but they thought that the church was a good place to have those needs addressed.

Another word that stood out in these interviews was *surreal*. Five parents used this word a total of seven times. Surreal was almost always used to describe the birth of the baby, and often was preceded in usage by a pause as the speaker looked for what word to use. I asked a couple of people to share what they thought that word meant, and their responses indicated something that was unbelievable and yet powerful.

Some of the words used most frequently describe the difficulty of parenting. *Tiring* was mentioned sixteen times by nine parents, *stressful* twenty times by six parents, and *overwhelming* twelve times by six parents. These descriptions were quite vivid in use: exhaustion to the point of hallucination was mentioned by two different fathers.

I remember I was laying in our spare bedroom trying to catch a couple winks and I remember thinking that [my child] was in the bed with me and somehow she got lost in the sheets, or just lost in the bed, and I couldn't find her. I remember getting up, I had the pillow on my side, going downstairs in a frantic state of mind, where's [my child], where's [my child], and I'm looking at [my wife] saying where's [my child]? And [my child's] on her lap, head's out there just looking at me. And she says go back to bed, [my child's] in my lap. (laugh) And that didn't happen just once, it happened twice, and maybe a third time. (B)

Unlike the Mahoney and Swank list, where only one word—biological—would allow the participants to name the everyday difficulties or physical exertions of being a parent, the parents I interviewed emphasized these aspects of parenting. In the book *Minding the Spirit: the Study of Christian Spirituality*, Meredith B. McGuire cautions readers against thinking about religion or spirituality in purely theoretical or intellectual terms that diminish the importance of physical realities.

Lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the stories out of which they live. And it comes into being through the often-mundane practices by which people transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action. Human bodies matter, because those practices . . . involve people's bodies [author emphasis], as well as their minds and spirits. (McGuire, 119).

If we as religious educators and faith community leaders do not acknowledge the physicality of parenting, we may also end up denying the physicality of giving birth and caring for young children, with all of the spiritual and theological insight that this journey might offer. My research suggests that new parents deeply experience the physicality of birth and parenting but are unable to connect this physical experience with Christian theology. This is a wonderful opportunity for conversations that bring out the incarnational Jesus, God with skin, needing to eat, sleep and pray, walking among us.

Not all of the words used described difficulties of parenting; the interviewees also spoke of *joy* (eleven times by seven people) and *love*. Joy is a word that I gave them through a question—what is your greatest joy in parenting—and as each parent answered, their words would become animated.

I think just the joy of having [my child] and the joy of being a parent. I would hope that people could see how much we enjoy having him there and how much we want him to enjoy church as much as we do. The flexibility in how church can be fun and you can laugh, when he does something silly or makes noise. But just the joy of us as a family. (Susan)

Their use of love is more difficult to quantify or describe. Although the actual word was used many times, how it was used and what it meant was often quite varied. Some parents spoke of loving what their children did, how their children lightened their lives—but some also talked of a deeper sense of love.

And the morning he turned, it was his second birthday, I went in to get him up out of bed and I was just I was just going to be so happy and "Happy Birthday" and blah, blah, blah, and all I could do was cry because I was just so

overwhelmed by how much you could love somebody and I just cried and cried. (Brenda)

Language of Men

There were several words or ideas that were expressed almost solely by the male respondents. David Murrow, in *Why Men Hate Going to Church* identified several similar terms and ideas in his book. He notes that feeling **incompetent** is a deterrent to men attending church. I found this was also key part of the labor and delivery experience conveyed by the male respondents. While these fathers didn't leave their wives during childbirth, they felt strongly enough to share their stories of being helpless or not knowing what to do. In the Christian tradition, we have many stories of men who grew in faith through times of perceived incompetence and helplessness (for instance in the case of Abraham, Zachariah, or Joseph). Sharing these stories with new fathers may have the ability to change a strong experience of incompetence or weakness into an opportunity for spiritual growth rather than seeing it as a failure. This will give them a new, stronger base from which to teach their sons and daughters about a life of faith.

A second theme that connected with Murrow's research is **hypocrisy**. In two different focus group conversations, men brought up the hypocrisy they see between what they think is happening in church and how that is lived in real life. This especially came to light as we had conversations regarding godparents and baptism. These men wanted to select people who would act as moral and spiritual guides for their children, while their wives selected close friends or family members who, it seemed, did not always fit that description. The discrepancy seemed to stem from a difference in how this role was perceived: the women wanted to select people who they believed would be more likely to be a part of the child's future (often a relative or close family friend), while the men seemed to be looking for role models. In these two focus groups, the conversation on selecting sponsors or godparents for the baptism ceremony became a very animated conversation. In a way, I sensed that this was an occasion in which the fathers wanted to assert their spiritual leadership in the family and, at least in two cases, they were not allowed to do so. From the conversations that I experienced, this would be an excellent topic to talk through in a baptism session.

A third idea, not as clearly connected with Murrow's findings, is **responsibility**. Fathers felt the weight of responsibility, providing for their families, and insuring a future of possibilities for their children. This was true even if their wives planned to return to work. There was a sense of narrowing of roles, or a desire to return to more traditional roles, that happened as the men took the mantle of fatherhood. Terrence Real gives psychological insight regarding men as they have been raised to relate to control and responsibility.

Traditional masculinity teaches men to feel both an entitlement to control and also the burden of unrealistic responsibility. How hard you may have tried pales in importance next to how well you think you did. I have said that for men, performance-based esteem [author emphasis] takes the place of healthy self-esteem, but even that puts it too gently. To be more precise, one would need to speak of results-based esteem. Most men have little faith that they will be cherished merely for their efforts. (Real 2002, 210)

Having to watch their wives in pain, trying to assert influence over the baptismal godparents, and living up to their own ideas of the responsibility of providing for a family—all issues of control and responsibility—were difficult items for these men that were brought to the fore through fatherhood. While they all told me—in their own words—how hard they were working, I'm not sure that they were convinced it was enough. Christian communities have much to share in this area in the exploration of grace, forgiveness and the idea of vocation. Striving to be a good father can be a spiritual practice in itself, not to gain perfection, but to take part in God's working in the world.

This sense of responsibility, in fact, also had a religious element. As related to faith, this responsibility was strong enough to bring these fathers back to church even if they had negative memories of their church life as children. In the focus groups, several men shared that, as children, church was at best uninteresting and unimportant—a chore. But within their comments about their childhood experience, there was also sense that taking children to church was something that good fathers did; they understood that the faith of their children somehow rested with them. These fathers indicated they wanted something different from the

faith community for their children—something that would be inviting and engaging, something that developed an active and living faith. As much as I heard that the fathers wanted this for their children, I also sensed that they wanted it for themselves and their children were providing new opportunities for them to seek this.

I found that I was worrying about how I acted and how I talked after I had kids, because before that, really it's just you and your wife, and she married you, you know, knowing how you are. But you might not want to be doing and saying the same things if there are kids around, whether it be swear words or where you are going, what you do on your days off, whether you sit around and watch TV all day on a Sunday watching football. I didn't want my son to look at me like, well gee, that's what dad does. That's what I should do too, you know. (father in a focus group)

In their conversations, I noted some similarities with the language of conversion utilized by Stanley Grenz.

Conversion is that life-changing encounter with the Triune God which inaugurates a radical break with our old, fallen existence and a new life in fellowship with God, other believers, and eventually with all creation. (Grenz, 179)

As some of the fathers in the male focus group talked about their children, they noted how children changed their outlook, and how they, as fathers, were invited to look anew at how they were living and acting in the world. Grenz goes on to speak of repentance in terms of an intellectual change which allows us to see our sins, an emotional change that causes us to regret past actions, and a volitional change that causes us to act in new ways. Children appeared to have the ability to bring all of these out in many of the men that I spoke with. They were, in fact, spiritual agents in the lives of their fathers. And, while the conversations rarely moved into theological language, it did move into relationality as the fathers talked together about what they wanted to change and how they wanted to father; a sense of community was being developed. Since all of these fathers in the focus group were part of a congregation, there was an underlying, if not always explicit, sense of faith being a piece of what they were working with. But it wasn't until the specific

faith/spiritual/religious topics were introduced to the group that they named this element out loud and engaged them in conversation. Finding ways to claim out loud the conversions that our children lead us to, and exploring the conversion in terms of “to what” and “for what” are important topics for the faith community to consider.

Along with and related to responsibility is a sense of **goal**. The men tended to talk about their goals for their children and families.

The responsibility is kind of like the saying, great opportunity great responsibility. So much because my child is a person, I can do so much good or bad, and I have the ability to shape her to be either a sloth or a great leader, or a great contributor, and/or. So it gives me great joy that if we do something right and God's help we can produce something that is a true wonder. (BJ)

This again relates to some of the issues of modern masculinity that Terrence Real has explored.

In modern culture, heroism has been stripped of virtually all of its spiritual significance. Removed from morality as well as from human community, heroism in our society has become a secular, individual achievement. . . . Both in our own lives and in the spectacles around us, we still search for higher meaning in achievement. We still equate performance with virtue. (Real 1997, 168)

For some of these fathers, I wonder if they are seeking their virtue, and perhaps spiritual significance, through the lives of their children. If their children turn out well (if the goals of parenting are met), then they have succeeded as fathers. In talking about his ability to shape her, BJ doesn't mention other forces in his daughter's life—including her own ability to eventually make decisions—that might shape her in a different way. There is no sense that he might do an excellent job of fathering and yet have a daughter that somehow does not meet his goal of leader and contributor. Biblically, this is an area that may need to be reframed. Verses such as the following from Proverbs 22:6, are well-known and oft-quoted: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” Does this mean that if the child does “stray” that the parent did not “train in the right

way?” Parenting is not a clear antecedent consequence process that produces a clear goal at the end; it is more of a journey in which, at best, parents can be faithful guides and companions. They are not the sole purveyors of the final outcome. Finding ways for our communities to explore and express fatherhood in the present, as a good journey toward a mature, faithful person and relational outcome for the father will set a stronger model for children than allowing the parents to believe and attempt to control an imagined perfect person in the future.

Finally, with the exception of the male pastor, the men were the least likely to mention God directly. They used language that related more to morals or good behavior rather than faith. I’m not sure if these men lacked a theological language, or if, in their past, church had become a place strongly related to “good behavior” and so they brought that language to bear in our conversations. Whatever the reason may be, the men seemed to be less comfortable with theological or spiritual language than the women. This is both an area for future exploration (to see why this language is not used) as well as an opening opportunity for conversation.

Language of Women

Women were more likely to speak about the incredible *love* they felt for their child, and it was not uncommon for tears to accompany their conversation about this point. These mothers felt a physical love and connection to their children that went beyond the connection due to childbirth. This was present even for Donna, who had adopted her child.

Women were also the only respondents who spoke of their congregations with the term *family*. This follows the description of roles given by Terrence Real.

Traditional socialization teaches girls to filter their sense of self-worth through connection to others, often at great cost to themselves, while it teaches boys to filter their sense of self-worth through their performance. (Real, 43)

Following Real’s lead, I would assert that women have been trained to use language of relationality; when the relationship with the church was strong, it was described as family—typically one of the

strongest bonds we acknowledge. Although the men were certainly aware of the communal aspects of their congregations, they did not connect this with the more intimate word of family. Most of the men were more interested in knowing how they could participate, or articulating what their children or spouse needed than building relationships—especially relationships that would be intimate enough to be called family. David Murrow also notes that for men, relationships take more time (perhaps, according to Real, due to the observation that they do not have the relational skills or language of women). Of the fathers I spoke with, only one had been in his congregation for a long period of time. This father did speak of the deep relationships of the group, although he did not use the term family. For the other fathers, it could very well be that they had not been in community with these people for long enough to build deep relationships. The women tended to have longer histories with the congregations, (often the men joined churches that their wives either already attended or they allowed their wives to select the church) or had found ways to build relationships through groups or service opportunities.

A second topic that only came up for the women was a *desire for their spouse to grow more deeply in faith, attend church, or pray with them*. Several women mentioned that they wanted to have faithful men in their lives, wanted to share the intimacy of prayer and worship with their intimate partners, but didn’t know how to change that aspect of their husband’s lives without damaging their marriage relationship. This is a wonderful reminder that communities of faith need to take an active role of supporting couples and parents in their spiritual growth. Having a third party (conversation partner, small group or class) encourage this growth means that the wife is able to journey with her partner on the spiritual journey rather than taking the role of leader or fixer.

Parenting as a Spiritual Endeavor

While all of the interviews contained language and experiences I would describe as spiritual, only some of the interviews expressed them with words that people in general would automatically associate with a specifically Christian context. For instance, of the

twelve individual interviews, the women were more likely to use the words God or Jesus. The only two men who used these terms often in their stories were the male pastor and the church youth worker. The words and topics that most parents used relate more to the type of spirituality that David Perrin describes in his book *Studying Christian Spirituality*. Perrin gives this starting definition of authentic spirituality.

Authentic spirituality, therefore, is not merely the way an individual generates meaning in life to feel good about his or her self and world. Authentic spiritualities involve the integration of all aspects of life in a unified whole. (Perrin, 17-18)

The parents I spoke with were in various stages of trying to integrate all of the aspects of life, which now includes parenting. While their language did not express explicit Christian faith and spirituality, they did seem to be describing spiritual encounters. Perrin lists four primary characteristics that he would include in his working definition of a humanist spirituality that relate to what I was hearing (Perrin, 18-19). I share two of these characteristics here.

The first characteristic of spirituality that Perrin describes is that of a *fundamental capacity in human beings to seek out meaning, values, and purpose in life*. He includes such endeavors as being empathetic, thoughtful, and self-sacrificial. Perrin claims these characteristics become Christian in nature when “. . . the Christian God is the ultimate concern of one’s life; self-transcendence refers to modeling one’s life after the life of Jesus; and the “spirit” in spirituality is identified with the Holy Spirit” (Perrin, 26).

In the following excerpt from one of the interviews, this father is describing how parenting has changed him in a way I would connect with this first characteristic of humanist spirituality.

I’ve got a sense of something of belonging to something larger than myself. Also contributing more, being able to give 110% when you feel like you’re just, can’t give any more. Like when [child] was born, those first two weeks, how could I even do that? You don’t get a choice, you just do it. Knowing that you can do that, that people are able to, if they want to, do that. Whatever endeavor that they try. (BJ)

This particular father is expressing his experience of being stretched and rising to a challenge. He now recognizes the ability of people—himself included—to go far beyond what is thought possible. However, within that experience (and the context of an interview talking about God experiences of parenting), he doesn’t mention any connection with God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit as a source of strength or model for perseverance. In other words, he does not articulate or name that he is being supported in this act of parenting by God. This is an opening for conversation regarding what it means to have God as the giver and sustainer of life, who calls us into our fullness of gifts.

Another characteristic is a *lived reality that is shaped into a way of life*. Perrin describes this characteristic.

Even the athletic way of life could be described as a spirituality within this understanding, for it requires commitment, discipline, and frequent repetition of particular skills. . . . Depending on what meaning, values, or purpose in life people have chosen, they will focus their activities and choices to nurture these. (Perrin, 26)

Parents expressed this in a number of ways, including renewed commitment to worship attendance and awareness of responsibility. One father tells how he and his wife reprioritized everything in their lives to prepare for this child.

I just think that it’s a miracle how this nine-month pregnancy is just right for easing us into parenthood. It’s just enough time to get us ready. Nothing can really get you ready, but it certainly does help focus you. And I learned, before my wife got pregnant I was in a band, and I was practicing a lot, she was taking swimming lessons, and we had all kinds of things going on in the evenings all the time. And then this baby is coming. I was on a neighborhood committee and then it was hard, but probably a month before [child] was born, I was calling people and saying I’m quitting the band, I’m quitting the neighborhood committee. (laugh) and all these things. We had to decide what is an extra in life and what is an essential in life, and clear ourselves and get ready for this baby. (Christopher)

This couple took time to reevaluate the values and sources of meaning in their lives as they

prepared for the arrival of their child. In this particular quote, Christopher does not connect this verbally with his faith in an explicitly Christian manner—there was no mention of God’s leading, or a sense of stewardship, or any words that would alert the listener to a religious context. But as I listened to the conversation, there was a sense that when one lived into the reality of concentrating on the essential things, something holy happened. In fact, at times in the various conversations, it sounded as though the children were the ultimate thing in life—that the child’s happiness and wellbeing were more important than anything else in the world, including their parents, other children, or God. This is an opportunity for the faith community to have conversations regarding God as the ultimate love, and wondering what it might mean if we think about God creating these children for the sake of the world.

Summary

I do believe that the advent and event of parenthood does, at the very least, hold the potential to enrich the faith life of a person. During this time adults find themselves in situations in which they have little control—even of their own bodies—and in which the very life of another human rests in their hands. It is also a time when infants, mostly helpless and unable to communicate, have the ability to break open the possibility for spiritual growth of the adults around them. There is fodder for a great deal of spiritual or existential conversation within those pieces, even without the psychological or social changes that occur. However, these respondents – who were all connected to a church in some way – did not automatically connect the parenting experience with their Christian spirituality or faith community in an integrative way. The church was named more as a transactional community (one that could provide service) rather than one of transformation and understanding. Therefore, if no faithful conversation occurs, conversation that connects the experience of the parent to the larger story and activity of God, the questions may not be asked that lead into a deeper theological awareness or connection. The parent may not experience the fullness of what it means to be in a relationship with this “other,” meaning either their child or their God. Currently the church is rarely there in the way these parents need. We ought to be engaging them in the

God conversations, meeting them where they are with the language they are familiar with, listening to their stories and proclaiming to them where God is already present and acting in their midst. When we are able to do this, we empower them to nurture the faith of their entire family – both themselves and their children.

Future Implications

In closing, I want to claim the realization that the more I spoke with these parents, the more I realized we have much to learn about the people in our faith communities. People of differing family systems, income levels, cultural settings, or religious affiliation may experience moments of holiness or sacredness in more ways than are identified here; moments that are not named by either the person or the church. I assert that parents need caring conversations with others who are willing to share their thoughts about the presence of God in the midst of this particular journey in order to realize the spiritual transformation that is already in process.

Almost all of the participants discovered something new about themselves as parents, their faith, perception of God, or their relationship with the church or children within the confines of these brief interviews. Despite the fact that I was speaking with total strangers, there was often a sense of bonding, of holy ground even, as we talked about these communities of faith and our children. I mention this as an area for future research because I do not believe that we, as religious educators, have spent enough time listening to the realities experienced by the people in our faith communities. Just having the conversation, and helping them make the connection between their daily life and the meta-narrative of our scriptures may not only deepen the faith of those we work with, but also hold the possibility of grounding our theological academic work in the real stuff of life.

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Additional Parent Reflections

Balance

Balancing my life. She stays at home with him all the time, and I'm gone all the time. You know when I come home I'm tired and I just want to sit and relax a little bit and I just don't have any more energy to give out. . . . I just don't know if I—a lot of times I don't have any more energy to give and that's been my greatest challenge has been mustering up that extra energy to give to them. (Donovan)

Surreal

You know when they laid him in my arms for the first time, it was so surreal. Is this really mine? You know what I mean? You don't even think that it's real. (Marie)

Incompetent

Oh man, even before that, it was pretty emotional just being there during the delivery. You know I can't really do anything, I'm kind of helpless (laugh) I mean I can offer up a hand, or I can help with breathing, but guess what—my wife's the one doing all of the work, so and so for me I was a little sad that I couldn't take some of that pain away. (Alan)

Responsibility

Well it's just all of a sudden, that you're not responsible for just you and your wife. There's another living thing that can't do anything. And it's completely dependent on you for absolutely everything. So it made you responsible real fast. (focus group participant)

Church Experience as Child (Male)

When I was a kid growing up, we went to church every Sunday. I remember asking my dad that same question: why do we have to go to church? Because I say so, you know, that's the only answer I got. And you will do it. You didn't have a choice. If he would have—maybe he didn't know the answer to it but if he would have at least sat down and said, well here's why we go to church and here's why you should pay attention in church. I never got that, and me as a kid, you know, I'm like, well then I'm not going to pay attention and as soon as I had a chance not to go to church I didn't go to church anymore. (focus group participant)

Spiritual Spouse

I'd like to try to get my husband, get him, not more interested, but more involved and not pry not push it on him. And just have it be easy because he's stand offish if I demand too much. . . I just wish that he'd step out of his box a little more. He's straight forward, hunting, got stuff to do, but I think, I don't know, I mean he did come to a service once, and the boys were acting up so he went to the nursery and watched them and he thought he was getting out of it. (Anna)