



Recognizing Life's Milestones with Faith

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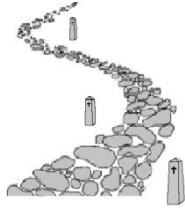
Our World Today

- Almost universal exposure to outside secular influences
 - Cell phones, Social media access, Movies, Television, and the press
- Rise in individualism and anti-family focus of society
 - Emphasis of self-worth and importance in education
- A general decline in the United States of Christian morality
 - Standards for language in public areas, movies, and television has relaxed greatly
 - The Military Academies now have to teach ethics and morality to new officers
 - Illegal drug use has reached all-time highs
 - 48% of American children are born to unwed mothers
 - Only 50% of Americans over 18 are married compared to 72% in 1960
 - Roughly 40% of American marriages end in divorce
 - America has the **largest** prison population on Earth
 - More than 1/3 of Americans (109 million) are on welfare
 - 45 million Americans are receiving food stamps
 - The end of “Right and Wrong” in that society now sees moral categories/values as nothing more than personal (or societal) preferences and opinions
- What effect has this had on making new Christian disciples?



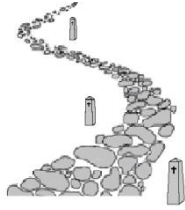
Current Situation

- Organized church attendance is declining rapidly
 - From 1990 to 2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the U.S. declined by 9.5% (5 million) while the U.S. population increased by 11% (24 million)
 - **Half** of all churches in the U.S. did not add any new members to their ranks in the last two years
 - Every year more than 4,000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1,000 new church starts
 - The U.S. now ranks **third** following China and India in the number of non-Christians
- Our Christian-raised youth are leaving the church in greater numbers
 - 70 to 75% of Christian youth leave the church after high school or earlier
 - More than half of all college professors view evangelical Christian students unfavorably (Free Republic)
 - College professors are **five times** more likely to identify themselves as atheists than the general public
 - 39% of young adults (18-29) are “nones”
 - Today’s young adults are **four times** more likely to be a “none” than young adults in the previous generation



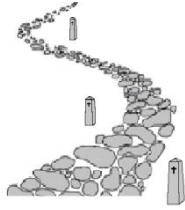
What can we do?

- Why is this happening?
 - Many theories exist as you can imagine
 - General Christian morality is being ushered out of society and replaced with a new morality of Self-Fulfillment (Pages 50-53 in Barna Trends)
 - Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) Survey (2016)
 - Major reasons youth leave religion
 - I stopped believing in the religion's teachings (60%)
 - **My family** was never that religious growing up (32%)
- Among other things, we certainly have a serious faith formation problem
 - Because most people do not teach, practice, or see faith expressed in their homes
 - We believe faith is formed at home and expressed to others at church and work, rather than being formed at church and expressed at home!!!
- We at Milestones Ministry have decided to develop leadership guides and reference materials to assist faith formation in the home, congregation, and community in order to help reverse the current declining faith formation trends

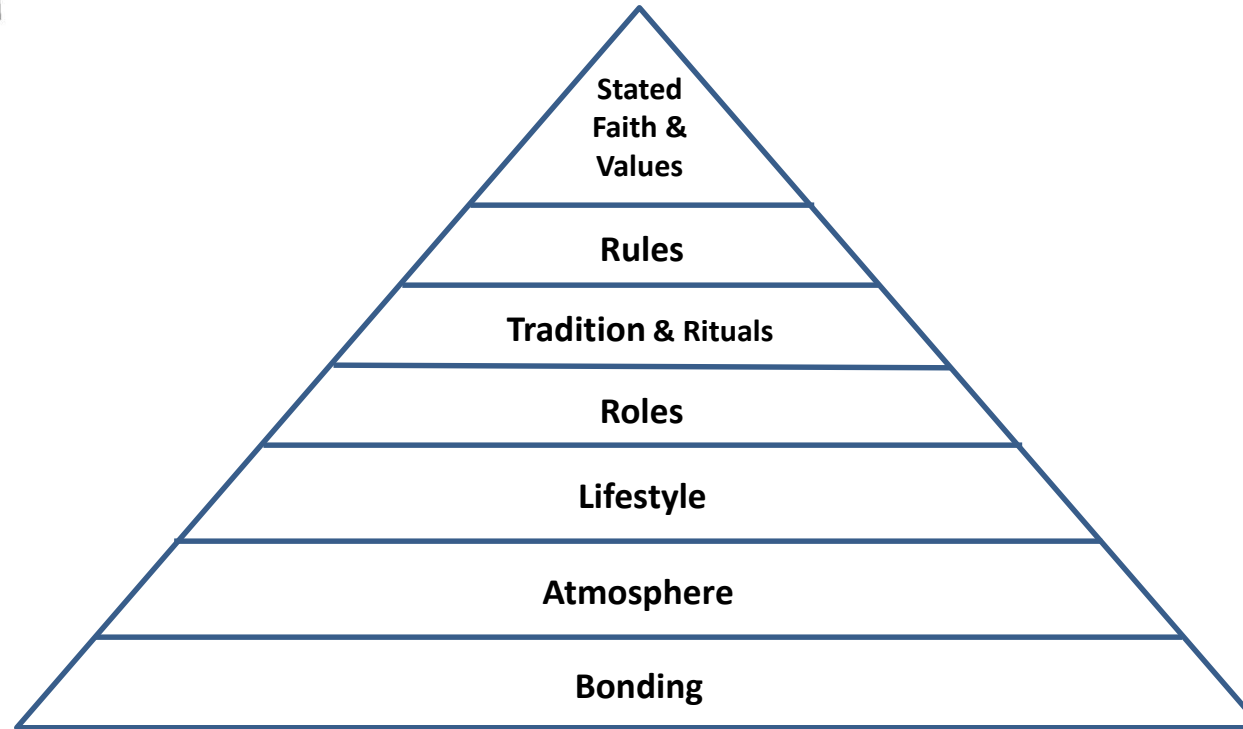


So What is Faith Formation?

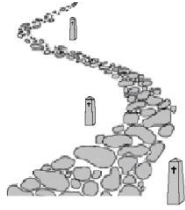
- Faith is not encoded in our DNA
 - We are not born with it, but must learn it from our environment
- So how do we assess people for hiring them?
 - We look at their knowledge, skills, abilities, and character
- Have you ever thought about what makes a Christian different from a non-Christian?
 - Some knowledge about what is in the Bible
 - A few skills at praying and blessing (maybe)
 - The ability to look interested during a sermon and perhaps quote some scripture
 - But mostly the difference is in **character**
 - It is what we do and how we act
 - It is how we think and relate to others
- It is our on-going living environment and relationship to people we respect that forms our character and really makes us Christians in behavior and actions
 - Faith formation is really character modification and growth
 - So how do we pass on **Faith and Values** to others



Passing On Faith and Values

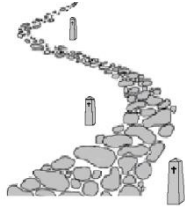


- Building each layer of this pyramid onto each other is key to generating faith formation in the home
 - So what can we do to build a faith formation environment?



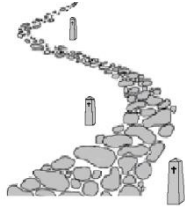
Creating a Faith Environment

- First, model the behavior and actions you seek yourself
 - Others model what they see, so you need to be an example for them
- Share your goals and expectations of having a faith life at home
 - Don't be hesitant about expressing your desires
- Express confidence in being a Christian
 - Don't be reluctant to pray
 - Don't be shy about blessing others
- Offer feedback that emphasizes the positive
 - Many parents take every moment with their children to be teaching events (i.e. correcting them, and telling what they should have done)
 - Think of them as an adult stranger (How would you say the same things? Very differently probably)
- Be thoughtful and generous with praise and awards
 - Small gifts and words of praise can invoke lifetime memories
- Nourish a culture of sharing and discussion
 - Ask questions and listen to the answers, then follow up with additional questions
- Use a Faith Formation framework of principals and practices



A Faith Formation Framework

- Apply the Five Principles for living and passing on faith
 - Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships
 - The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and home
 - Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too
 - Faith is caught more than it is taught
 - If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults
- Use the Four Key Faith Practices
 - Caring Conversations
 - Devotions
 - Service
 - Rituals and Traditions (Blessing)
- Practice the Three Characteristics for Christians
 - Being Authentic
 - Being Available
 - Being Affirming
- Use this framework to build an on-going faith formation strategy



Faith Formation Strategy

- A Faith Formation Strategy has three parts
 - A determination of the nature of the problem
 - A guiding plan for dealing with the problem
 - Deliberate action items for carrying out the guiding plan
- Our problem is an ever greater secular and pluralistic society with little emphasis on home faith formation
- So what is the guiding plan for dealing with a lack of faith formation?
 - Create a consistent, nurturing, and steady home faith formation environment
 - Utilize the faith formation framework practices
 - Emphasize faith every week using something like Taking Faith Home inserts
 - Bring faith into personal and family milestones celebrations
- But what things do we need to do as deliberate action items?
 - Bring faith back into our normal everyday lives
 - Utilize the four key faith practices whenever possible
 - Recognize milestone life accomplishments as faith formation events
- Utilizing a strategy is not a band aid fix, but a long-term effort
- It is our own responsibility to do this as role models for others



Life's Milestones

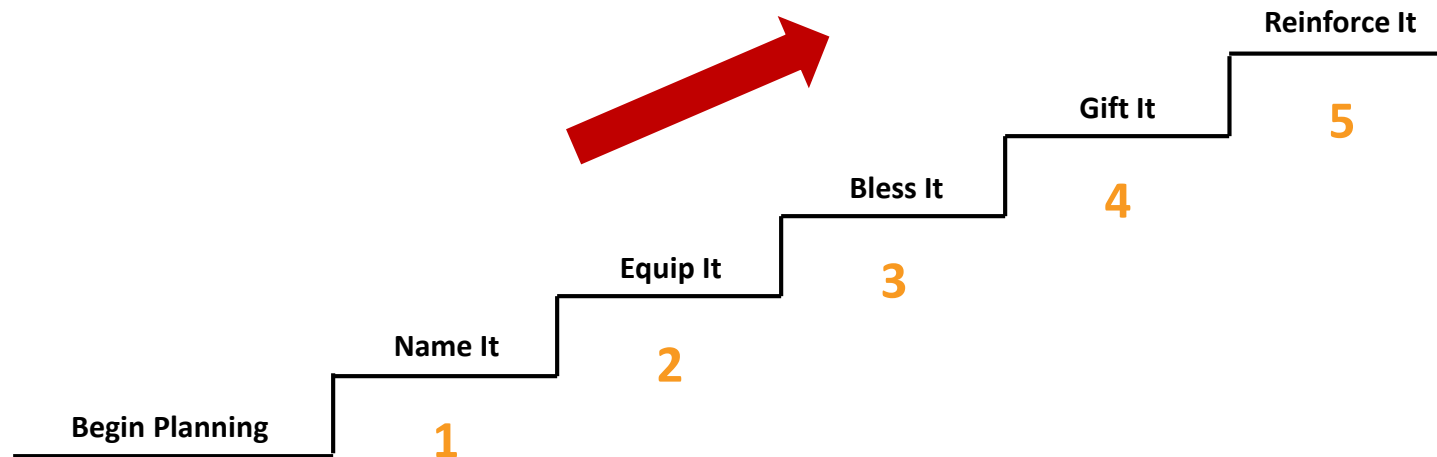


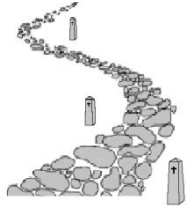
- So what are life's milestones?
 - Milestones were used along pathways to mark distance and allow travelers to know where they were on their journey
 - Our lives are full of both major and minor milestones which could be recognized
 - We generally let most of them pass without too much notice
- Most people observe certain milestones
 - Birthdays
 - Anniversaries
 - Marriage
 - Graduations
 - Retirement
- However there are many more events that could be recognized
 - Getting a Driver's License
 - Beginning school
 - New job
 - New home
- Milestones Ministry provides simple resources to help families and congregations plan and implement milestone recognitions with faith



Developing a Milestone Event

We have identified a five-step structure to use when recognizing a milestone which allows most to create their own milestone event. When these five-steps are used, the milestone experience has a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation.

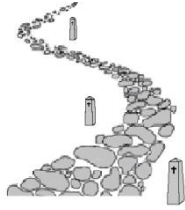




Name the Event

- So what is the first step in planning a milestone event?
 - Determine what events you want to recognize and name them
 - Set priorities as to what is important in your household's life
 - We can't celebrate everything, but need to pick and choose the best ones for your family
- Why is it important to name it?
 - In order to have a plan, you need to deliberately identify what actions are to be done (i.e. name them)

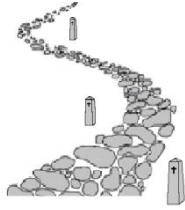
"but a good name lasts forever." (Sirach 41:13b)



Equip the Event

- So what is the second step in developing a milestone event?
 - Determine the caring conversation questions and ritual and tradition practice that you want to equip the event with
- Caring conversation questions
 - Normally we recommend two to four questions to spark caring conversations
 - They should be related to the event and invoke memories, stories, and reflection between the generations
- Ritual and tradition selection
 - The ritual and tradition could be one already practiced
 - The practice should be fun, related, and involve everyone
- Why is it important to equip it?
 - The caring conversation faith practice relates each member to each other and passes on generational connectivity
 - The ritual and tradition practice produces long-term memory association

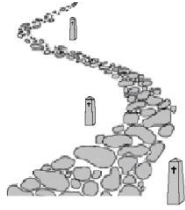
“so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:17)



Bless the Event

- What is the middle step in developing a milestone event?
 - Create a small devotion to tie this event to the history and relevance of the Bible
- Selecting a scripture verse to read
 - Use a concordance to find an appropriate verse that relates to the event
 - Select two or three questions about the scripture verse for discussion
- Develop a prayer to use for blessing each other and the event
- So why is it important to bless it?
 - The devotion faith practice brings the relevance of the Bible's contents into today's world and helps foster turning to it for guidance and wisdom
 - A prayer and blessing for each other is a fundamental action and behavior of Christians that should be practiced often to become comfortable for everyone
 - It generates faith through the power of the Holy Spirit through trusted, caring, and personal relationships

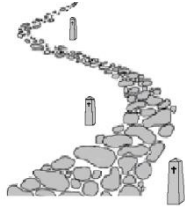
“While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51)



Gift the Event

- What is fourth step in developing a milestone event?
 - Selecting a visual reminder as a gift to help the milestone moment be recalled again and again
- Selecting an appropriate gift as a remembrance item
 - It does not have to be a large or expensive article, however it should be semi-durable to last over years
 - It should relate to the event, a bring memories back to the person
 - These items typically go into faith chests, keepsake boxes, faith bowls, or onto of bedroom dressers
- So why is it important to gift it?
 - Visual reminders to people of past milestone events supports their faith environment and reinforces their Christian culture and behavior
 - Gifts help to build personal, caring, and meaningful relationships

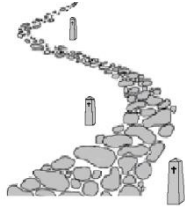
“A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.” (Proverbs 18:16)



Reinforce the Event

- What is the final step in recognizing a milestone event?
 - Determine a related service action to do for others after the event
 - Establishing a time and place for a follow-up event
- A related service action or kindness to reach out to others
 - The service faith practice reinforces the milestone event by involving others
- Hosting a follow-up gathering
 - Have a later gathering of those involved in the milestone to help it gain deeper meaning in the life of faith of those who participated
 - Share stories on what was remembered and what did it mean to each participant
- So why is it important to reinforce it?
 - As part of the learning process, we need repeated exposures of events or ideas in order to embed it into our memories
 - Sharing common experiences and memories helps to build personal, trusted, and meaningful relationships

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26)



Expectation of Results

- What can we expect after we start using a Faith Formation Strategy and recognizing life's milestones?
 - A more consistent, faith-filled home and church environment to help establish, shape, and nurture Christian faith formation
 - A greater number of people who have a stronger and more prevalent faith life at home who find joining a congregation more rewarding and relevant
- A real change in the dynamics of relationships with friends and family members
 - Closer and more personal relationships with friends and family members
 - A stronger sense of Christian heritage and culture and of belonging to the faith
 - More meaningful discussions and conversations with our family members and friends
 - A deeper and stronger Christian moral compass within our children to help them better navigate the perils of today's secular world

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19a)



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"Memorable moments in the faith lives of individuals and communities."