

LIVING BEYOND OURSELVES

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Yesterday our Pastor gave an excellent talk about showing kindness to others. I immediately thought of one of our parenting beliefs. Families should be God-centered, parent-directed, family-orientated, and outwardly focused.

Unfortunately, our culture has changed a great deal over the centuries. It has moved away from the sharing and caring for others, and embarked on the 'me first' attitude. An infant will, of course, be the center of attention. The problem arises when the family dynamics remain static. The child needs to be absorbed into the *already established* family. If the 'infant' family dynamic remains, then the child automatically thinks the world continually revolves around him. Unfortunately, many parents do not understand that children need to grow into the family structure. It is not healthy to have a child-centered family. Kids are not in charge. Parents are. Kids need to understand that it is not all about them.

What evidence do we see around us that confirms our culture's selfish attitude? Just take a look at any fashion store on sale day. There seem to be more clothes on the floor than on the hangers. Who put them there? Whose job is it to pick them up? No, it is not the store assistant's job. Whoever dropped them needs to put them back, and if we, a third party, come across clothes lying on the floor, why shouldn't we just pick them up and place them back on a hanger? How many times do we see frozen foods placed on open shelves in supermarkets because a shopper couldn't be bothered returning them? Then there are the school cafeterias. When my husband was doing lunch duty, kids would refuse to pick up trash left on the table by someone else. How many young people these days allow the elderly to go ahead in a line, or help them carry their heavy parcels?

To initiate the outflow of kindness, several components need to be in place within the family. First, there needs to be a strong set of values to protect and give worth to each family member. These values should include an outward focus of goodwill towards the community. When parents demonstrate a 'volunteering spirit' and involve their kids in these activities, the children catch the spirit of giving and the pleasure it gives others who are not expecting it.

There was a great movie out some years ago starring Kevin Spacey called, "Pay it Forward." It was a truly inspirational story about the effect of passing on kindness. If you have an opportunity, rent it out. Our church has been involved in a new program called, 'Ark Almighty' (www.arkalmighty.com). It is a website established in the wake of the movie 'Evan Almighty' that provides an opportunity for people to ask for help, and for others to offer their expertise. ARK stands for Acts of Random Kindness. Already this service has been a blessing to many folks.

There are many ways in which kids can get involved in helping others, but the seed is sown at home. Is your home God-centered, parent-directed, family-orientated, *and* outward-focused?

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.