

# Discipleship and the Missionary Kid

Bonnie Gouge

**M**y parents are too busy for me. They spend time with everyone else, but don't have time for me. Maybe if they spent some time with me, I wouldn't have so much time to spend drinking and playing around with drugs."

An 18-year-old missionary kid (MK) shared this with one of our five children. While each person is responsible for his or her own decisions, this MK found very little support or encouragement at home.

## Jesus' interactions with the disciples can form a valuable model for missionary parents.

Mom and dad were wonderful missionaries, fulfilling the Great Commission, giving their lives to others. But, somewhere along the line they missed the opportunity to get involved in the life of their own child in a way that produced a solid, mature, godly young person.

According to Dallas Willard, "Spiritual formation doesn't happen in a program at the church. It happens by

living your life" (2005). Jesus' daily interaction with his disciples authenticates this. Jesus lived with his disciples. He ate with them; he walked and talked with them. He did not classify his time with the twelve as quality vs. quantity. He simply called twelve men to walk with him and he poured his life into them, teaching them how to live by showing them how to live. Daily life became a classroom and everyday experiences became object lessons.

Jesus' interactions with the disci-

ples can form a valuable model for missionary parents as they interact with their children. While dealing with the spiritual formation of a young woman, I make it clear that spiritual formation or discipleship of her children cannot wait until they are teenagers, but must begin when they



**Bonnie Gouge** has served with World Gospel Mission in Bolivia since 1985. While raising five children, she has served in the nursing profession as well as worked alongside her husband in field leadership.



Godly parenting with the goal of spiritual formation of children requires a focused and strong commitment to be involved in the lives of our children of all ages.

are small children. Any discipleship program requires commitment. Godly parenting with the goal of spiritual formation of children requires a focused and strong commitment to be involved in the lives of our children of all ages.

## Understanding Discipleship

Before addressing the principles involved in discipleship, an understanding of discipleship is necessary. An editorial in *Christianity Today* describes discipleship this way:

Each young believer needs a mature disciple who has walked this way before and who can, in a transparent relationship, help the newer Christian toward the dual knowledge of God and self. Such relationships...are essential to our growing in grace. ("Make Disciples. Not Just Converts" 1999)

tice under the tutelage of a master" (2001, 17). He defines discipleship as "becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ" (2001, 17). Bill Hull tells us that discipleship always means a supremely personal union (1988, 56). Discipleship, then, is the process where a mature Christian builds a personal, transparent relationship with a younger Christian for the purpose of producing a competent and competent follower of Jesus Christ with a deep understanding of God and self.

A discipleship plan for a 17 or 18-year-old daughter of a missionary would have as its goal a young woman who is a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ with a deep understanding of God, as well as an understanding of who she is in him. In order to achieve that goal and fulfill the definition of a discipler, the parent or mature Christian must first commit to a personal and transparent relationship with his or her child.

According to George Barna, "A disciple refers to someone who is a learner or follower who serves as an appren-

While this sounds like a lofty goal, the missionary parent can follow Jesus' discipleship principles of walking and talking with his disciples, and apply them to his or her child.

### Principles of Discipleship

Below are some principles for discipleship.

**1. Selectivity.** Choosing twelve disciples out of the many, Jesus then preferred three out of the twelve. Selectivity allows focus and concentrated effort. So, as a parent, choose your child! See the potential and the possibility, and believe in him or her. Hull explains that selectivity protects the product, and produces a good product (1988, 150-151). By intentionally choosing to disciple and shape your own children, you are giving them

**3. Transparency.** A parent or missionary Christian must also have a personal and transparent relationship with his or her child. This requires time and availability. Jesus spent time with his disciples, thus impacting their lives and the world. As parents, we too must spend time with our children in order to impact them. Only as we share intimately in their lives can we follow Jesus' example of taking advantage of daily events to teach truth. Jesus used object lessons and told stories. Likewise, taking advantage of daily events, we can teach truth or share our passion for the Lord. For example, playing sports together can be a challenge to practice what you preach, even when the other team cheats. Because our family loves sports, time spent together often means time spent on a

opportunity for more than just good exercise; it gave us the opportunity to interact and teach life lessons.

In addition to spending time with his disciples, Jesus was transparent with his followers. Asking them to share in his darkest hour, Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to pray with him as he faced the cross. As parents, it is important we let down our masks and allow our children to see us work through strife and difficulties. Watching us walk through crises, they learn how to handle themselves in difficult situations. Another MK experienced some intense struggles in the home, where transparency was not present and tension built to the breaking point. Concerned only about protecting their reputation, these missionary parents prohibited their teen

prayed for those who would believe by their testimony and for complete unity. He concluded by praying that his glory and love would be in them. While this prayer may or may not be used daily, parents should make it a habit to pray for their children in their presence. What a powerful way to impact our young people. Praying for or blessing our children as they go out the door gives the child a sense of security and purpose.

As a senior in high school, Veronica was excited to be chosen as a counselor for junior high camp. Understanding what it meant to grow up among two worlds, Veronica prayed that God would give her the opportunity to love these girls and to share his love and her experiences with them. While she packed her suitcase

## A parent or mature Christian must have a personal and transparent relationship with his or her child.

tools that will protect them as well as help produce a "good" end product.

**2. Investing.** While living on the campus of a small Bible school, mentoring young Bolivian couples, and providing healthcare to the students, I chose to set aside each afternoon to supervise homework. With needs clamoring all around me, I selected my dyslexic boys. Reading science, literature, or social studies aloud, creatively drilling spelling words, sometimes writing them in dry jello or sand, I gave my boys a foundation for learning. They learned that success is not easy, but it is possible. They learned that things that really matter take time and effort, but it is worth the effort.

sports field. After her siblings graduated from high school and left home, our daughter Veronica was left alone with mom and dad, so along with Bolivian seminary students and friends, we became either her teammates or opposing team members during the games. Being intense competitors, the games were always close and provided opportunities for learning. Walking home from the basketball court, we often discussed good sportsmanship, or how the new player handled him or herself. We often asked Veronica her perception of the game, of the players, how they interacted, and even what their actions reflected about their character. Our playing together was an

## Parents should make it a habit to pray for their children in their presence.

from sharing the verbal tirades, the attempted suicide, or the drinking. They would not seek help for fear of losing their status. This young MK struggled to find a God of love and truth when the missionary home was founded on lies and deceit. Our teens have the ability for cognitive thinking and can see and understand the reality of our lives. We need to be transparent and willing to let them learn how God can make a difference in our lives.

**4. Prayer.** A powerful discipleship tool that will impact our teens is to pray for them as Jesus prayed for his disciples. In his priestly prayer (John 17) Jesus prayed that they would know him and for their protection. He

and hunted for devotional thoughts, I baked cookies for her to give to her girls. Before Veronica left the house we surrounded her with our arms and prayed that God would protect her, for unity in her cabin, that the girls would believe in him through the hearing of his word and through the testimony of Veronica's life, and that God's glory and love would surround Veronica and flow out of her life into these young girls. Veronica left for camp, knowing that mom and dad would be praying for her and for her girls.

**5. Affirmation.** Jesus also affirmed others. He publicly confirmed the centurion for his faith. While publicly

confirming your teen may seem prideful, there are occasions when it can be done with grace and significance. As a parent, we can be our child's greatest fan. If public affirmation is not possible, affirm and praise your teen in private. Yearning for parental approval, your teen will seek and find approval elsewhere if you are not willing to give it.

Writing to your child is one way to affirm him or her. Spending her junior year in the States was difficult for Veronica; as a typical Third Culture Kid (TCK)<sup>1</sup>, she struggled to understand where she fit in a country that was stamped on her passport, but not on her heart. As Christmas quickly approached, we struggled with what to buy her that would be meaningful. We remembered that we had made her older sister a cross from the gold mined near the town where we lived our first term and where Veronica was born. It was the perfect gift. While her dad orchestrated the crafting of a white gold cross, I wrote these words to affirm our love for her and printed them as a bookmark.

*"May this cross, given to you by your parents, made from Guarayo gold, and crafted in the USA, always remind you of who you are."*

*You are Veronica Joy Gouge, beloved daughter of Ron and Bonnie Gouge.*

*You are an American, born abroad, yet, You are a Bolivian, born in the jungle village of Asencion.*

*You are a TCK, taking the best from Bolivia and from the USA to make a beautiful blend.*

*You are a daughter of the King.*

*You are complete in Christ.*

*You are free from condemnation.*

*You are hidden with Christ in God.*

*You are the salt and light of the earth.*

*You are God's workmanship.*

*You are God's temple.*

*You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you."*

Jesus included his disciples in his ministry. They helped him feed the five thousand and brought the sick and hurting to him. Likewise, we can include our teens in our ministry opportunities. I recently opened my home to both our Bolivian church leaders and our mission leadership team. Our daughter helped me pull the last minute details together. She was there when I prayed for the evening as well as for her and the others who were serving the table and cooking. She saw her father serve our Bolivian church leaders. Watching us interact with our Bolivian and missionary colleagues, she gained insight into interpersonal skills.

**6. Compassion ministry.** One area in which missionary parents have many opportunities to model Christ's example is through compassion and helping the poor. We are surrounded with needs. As we love the unlovely and willingly share with the less fortunate, our children learn to give and care for others. They also learn discernment as they see us struggle with how much to give, when to give, and whom to give to.

**7. Scripture reading.** As parents, we impart our love of scripture to our children through example. Reading together as a family is a wonderful way for your children to understand the importance of knowing God's word. One of our sons attributes much of his understanding, common sense, and ability to reason to our mom-

ing reading of Proverbs. Reading together at the breakfast table before everyone goes their separate ways is a great way to start the day. However, this requires discipline. Likewise, this is an excellent opportunity to model prayer for others. You can incorporate your prayer for your children into this time of seeking him together.

**8. Spiritual accountability.** Whether the parent can personally be involved or not, the young person will benefit greatly from some type of spiritual accountability. Whether the teen finds that through an older mentor, or through peer groups, the parent should be willing to facilitate this time for his or her teen. While it is tempting to keep the apron strings tight, the MK in particular needs to learn to develop outside relationships that can help him or her gain spiritual insight and growth. While maintaining close family ties, encourage and facilitate deep spiritual connections and relationships for your teen.

Part of the spiritual formation of children is to present them as workers who need not be ashamed, complete and competent not only spiritually, but also competent in life skills. MKs have unique challenges they will face when they are launched alone into college life in their home country. As missionary parents, part of our discipling should include teaching our children basic life skills. The MK should know how to handle money so that by the time he or she heads off to college, he or she is capable of managing his or her own funds. By the time he or she is in his or her teens, he or she should have learned and understood the importance and practice of tithing, saving, and good

money management. Living on his or her own, far away from mom and dad, the MK must have good decision-making skills. This comes from experience, so the missionary parent will need to give freedom to the MK to make many of his or her own decisions, and then allow him or her to suffer the consequences of those decisions. Life skills such as driving, cooking, ironing, washing clothes, and banking are also important to the MK who will soon be independent.

## Conclusion

My definition of discipleship includes the goal of producing a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ with a deep understanding of God and self. In order for the MK to truly understand him or herself, the missionary parent must be willing to discuss openly the blessings as well as the unique challenges of being an MK. Open dialogue is important as the MK comes to terms with his or her TCK identity. In addition to dialogue there are resources available to the missionary parent and the MK through Interact International as well as Barnabas International. Understanding and coming to terms with his or her TCK heritage affects the person's entire life and is an important aspect of the MK having an understanding of God and self.

Choosing your MK, spending time with him or her, being transparent with your child, affirming your child, him or her in ministry are all ways that missionary parents can impact the lives of their children, just as Jesus impacted the lives of the twelve disciples. Then, as we launch them into

the world, we can trust that our child will be a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ with a deep understanding of God and self.

#### Endnote

1. According to David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken, "A TCK is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in the relationship to others of similar background" (2001, 17).

#### References

- Barna, George. 2001. *Growing True Disciples*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Waterbrook Press.
- Hull, Bill. 1988. *The Disciple-making Pastor*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Revell.
- "Make Disciples, Not Just Converts." *Christianity Today*. October 1999. Accessed June 5, 2008 from <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/october25/9tc028.html>.
- Pollock, David and Ruth Van Reken. 2001. *Third Culture Kids, The Experience of Growing Up among Worlds*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Willard, Dallas. 2005. "The Apprentices." *Leadership Journal*. Accessed June 5, 2008 from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2005/003/2.20.html>. ■

## "Help! My Child's Been Arrested!":

A Parent's Guide to Navigating the Juvenile Justice System

By Scott Larson and John Kinsley



**NEW  
IPM  
Booklet!**

This third booklet in the Institute for Prison Ministries (IPM) Library is designed to be a type of "First-Aid" kit for parents who have experienced the arrest of a child. It will help you navigate this difficult journey. You'll learn: what happens immediately after your child's arrest, how to understand the juvenile justice system, what happens when your child returns home, and more.

**Only \$3.95! Quantity discounts available.**

"This booklet is a practical and much needed resource to help parents during a time of stress and fear."

—Don Smarto,  
President, Youth  
Direct Ministries

#### ORDER MULTIPLE COPIES AND SAVE!

- 20% discount for 2-10 copies (only \$3.16 ea.)
  - 30% discount for 11-50 copies (only \$2.76 ea.)
  - 50% discount for more than 50 copies (only \$1.98 ea.)
- Plus 10% shipping and handling

**Purchase online:** [www.emisdirect.com](http://www.emisdirect.com)  
**Email:** [emis@wheaton.edu](mailto:emis@wheaton.edu) • **Call:** 630.752.7158  
**Write:** EMIS, P.O. Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189

Published by the Evangelism and Missions Information Service at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill.

# MISSION INSURANCE CUSTOMIZED!

Since 1980, Adams & Associates International has been providing mission-specific policies to mission groups of all sizes, as well as to individuals. We can provide options and solutions from our extensive portfolio of missionary specific coverages—in many cases even customizing to meet your particular needs.

When insurance companies sell you "off the shelf" policies, you often pay for extra coverage that you don't need. Or even worse, you may not get the coverage you do need.

- Trip Cancellation Insurance
- Medical Professional Liability
- Emergency Assistance
- Personal Security Services
- Property & Casualty Programs
- Volunteer Missionary Insurance
- Accident & Special Risk Insurance
- Life Insurance & Related Products
- Automobile Insurance
- International Health Insurance

**ADAMS & ASSOCIATES®**  
INTERNATIONAL

**G** Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management Services, Inc.

803.758.1400  
800.922.8438

Fax 803.252.1988

[www.aaintl.com](http://www.aaintl.com)

