

JACK'S CORNER: In the aftermath of the Florida school shootings, we parents are left with a multiplicity of feelings: anger at how helpless we might truly be in protecting our kids, fierce determination to protect them, fear that somehow this kind of evil might touch our kids directly, sacrificial love for our kids (that comes about as close as it gets to God's love), and frustration with a problem that we as a nation and culture can't seem to handle.

For people of faith, and for those who are re-thinking their faith, thoughts turn to God... "we need you; we question you; we want to trust, but it's hard; we do trust, but it's still so incredibly sad; we long for a solution." We practice our "Lock-down" drills (A good thing!), but are often still disillusioned that we now live in world where such things are not only necessary, but expected. Our children know and experience far more than "they should have to." But, wishful thinking and reminiscing about "when we were young the problems were..." don't ease our hearts. Bemoaning the realities of today fixes nothing.

I believe equipping is better than protecting. Don't get me wrong, I have protected my kids, and I want to keep on protecting my kids to the best of my ability. But, the older they get, and the crazier the world gets, the more I realize my ability to protect is becoming more and more limited. I'm not always there; I don't always know; I can't always prevent, but I can work to equip. I can help my kids to be as savvy, shrewd, crafty and as solid in their faith as they can be. Such equipping is a great gift of love and the best a parent can do.

What does equipping look like in light of the Florida shootings?

1. Let us not be afraid of the difficult questions that will come, both from our children and from inside of ourselves (See *Jack's Corner* about "Why bad things happen."). God can handle those questions. These events are opportunities for our children and us to solidify deep faith convictions. Equip them with faith!
2. Let us find tangible ways to reach out to those who need our help. Our children will learn from us that faith shows itself in action. These events are opportunities for God's people to shine. God chooses to use us to give His comfort and encouragement, also to meet the physical needs of others. Equip them to help!
3. Let us remember to hug our kids a little longer, pray more fervently with them, and appreciate them in renewed ways. These events can be used by God to increase the closeness in our families and bond us together in His Spirit. Equip them with close family relationships!
4. Let us not be afraid of allowing our children to feel enough fear to draw them to God and enough fear to help equip them to handle the reality of life in a sinful and fallen world. Again, in the long-term scheme of life, equipping is better than protecting. Seize this opportunity for our children to mature in their dependence on God; He alone is our ultimate

salvation! Scary, dangerous and evil things will find us, but our God is greater! Equip them with hope!

5. Let us consider carefully both the age and spiritual maturity of our children as we talk to them about tragedies. Don't be afraid of letting children see **some** of the pictures and be a part of **some** of the discussions. With adult presence and explanation ("These pictures are real! This is not some movie with special effects."), these scenes can develop Christian empathy and provide a vivid picture in our hearts as we pray. Younger children need to know something, but not everything. Equip them with knowledge and experience that lead to compassion!
6. Let us not confuse children who don't care all that much with children who are faith-equipped to handle evil and tragedies. Equip them with empathy by knowing their hearts!
7. Let us listen, listen and listen. Feelings might not go away quickly. All kids are different in their psychological and spiritual make-up. They recover in different ways and at different speeds from events they hear about and see. Equip them by individually understanding them!
8. Let us give lots of physical touch! Help increase your children's feelings of security. Equip them with loving touch!
9. Let us help our children find comfort in knowing there is "a plan of action" for possible tragedies. Talk to them about being proactive and wise in dealing with tragedies and evil where proactive steps are possible. God's Word should be the underpinnings of our plan. Equip them with a plan!
10. Let us help our children take their cue from how they observe their parents' reactions when they experience tragedies and evil. Equip them with a parent's strength!

We cannot escape the ramifications of evil in this world. We cannot move away from it, nor buy our way out of it, nor pray our way out of all of it. Evil overflows onto us all, collectively and individually, purposefully and gratuitously. In this sinful and fallen world, there are problems that have no good answers, only the "best" answer...which may not be that good. Don't we all wish there was a good answer to every problem?

God does not remove us from all evil in this world; he gives us the strength and hope to get through it. He does not promise a house without storm, but a house that can withstand the storm. "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) There are few events that have the power to deeply transform suburban Christians making them more into the image of Christ; tragedies are such events. Let us not minimize, ignore, or rationalize them away with our children. **Let us enter all tragedies with our arms around our children and with God at our side! Equip them in Christ!**

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