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# Why Raising Kids in LA can be Great for their Faith.

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“Everyone knows raising children in the city is harder, right? Well: yes and no, but mostly no, says former NYC Pastor Tim Keller in a powerful message on the subject.” \*

Andrew Wilson, King’s Church London

\*[gospelinlife.com/downloads/it-takes-a-city-to-raise-a-child-8209/](http://gospelinlife.com/downloads/it-takes-a-city-to-raise-a-child-8209/)



LOS ANGELES

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When the Lord was preparing Ger and Lizzie Jones to leave Raleigh, North Carolina (and their suburban house in a comfortable cul de sac!) to come and plant Vintage LA, he used a message from Pastor Tim Keller to encourage them that they could raise their family both IN the city and IN the faith.

We at Vintage want to pass this confidence on to our families as you also consider the reality of raising children here in LA.

If you're familiar with the late Pastor Keller, you can imagine that his approach to the subject of raising kids in a city is very thoughtful, insightful and practical. We hope that our LA "version" of this message might also provide you with thought provoking and practical guidance about raising and discipling your children in LA. May you be encouraged as you consider how the Lord might be calling you to navigate raising children in our current modern urban culture.

Keller begins by conceding three things that make cities harder places to simply raise children, let alone disciple them. However, he then gives eight reasons why they can be better places to bring up our kids in the faith, and we at Vintage are convinced this is true not only for New York but for Los Angeles as well.

**We believe that not only can children who grow up in LA become Jesus followers, but that because they have been raised and disciplined here - as opposed to a more "comfortable" Christian community - their faith in Christ has the potential to be more personal, confident, real world, generational and missional.**

This is a bold claim and so we want to begin with some foundational truths to keep in mind as we step out in faith to raise our children here in the city.

Firstly, God alone is the Lord of salvation. We as parents can't "make" our kids become Jesus followers, but we can create an ecosystem for their discipleship and we believe that doing this in the city has more advantages than disadvantages.

Why do we believe this? One image that has been powerful for us is how plants are able to flourish in the desert because of the reality that roots go deep when they have to: desert plants don't get rain from above so they must go deep to find the water which will nourish them. This image is one that has informed our thinking about discipling, and it is part of why we are bold to say that our children's faith can develop deep roots not in spite of being in the "ecosystem" of LA, but because they have grown up in this desert city.

The second truth flows directly from the above and that is the reality that we need to be ruthlessly deliberate about our family's ecosystem. Perhaps this is self evident, but we believe it needs to be said because time and again, we have seen parents paying lip service to this idea, but not making consistent life choices based on this reality.

The city isn't neutral - our children WILL be disciplined - the question is by whom?

Los Angeles is a disciple-making machine for the sake of secularism, pluralism and progressive liberalism. If we want our children to be disciples of Jesus, we need to be proactive. In the letter of Jeremiah to the nation of Israel living in Babylon, the prophet has no confusion about the current situation of the Israelites - they are in exile and living in a culture that wants to indoctrinate them to its values. However his response is not to incite fear in the people, rather he exhorts them to have their eyes wide open as they pray for their city and seek to be faithful to a God who he proclaims will be faithful to them. (Jeremiah 29)

As families in 21st century LA, we also have to understand that we are living in exile - in "Babylon" - and that this is the reality our children are growing up in. The more we understand this, the more we are equipped to understand what our role is. And the truth is, we are no longer alone in this reality as urban parents. As Jon Marc Comer points out in his book "Live No Lies", there is now a "Digital Babylon" that is the reality for the next generation (and we would argue for all of us). Parents in the suburbs or more culturally Christian communities may be lulled into a false sense of security. However those of us raising our kids in the city should be under no such illusions.

And so we present to you our Angeleno notes on this powerful Keller message. We hope and pray that you will be both encouraged and exhorted about the high calling we all have to disciple the next generation in the city of LA.

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## Disadvantages

**1. Cities are expensive.** Many people live in smaller homes, have less disposable income, have less personal space and are able to invest less in family comforts, and so on. This is perhaps the biggest disadvantage, and the one that prompts the most families to leave for the suburbs or less expensive cities. At the same time, you will see below that this reality can also lead to one of the greatest potential advantages of more connection with your children.

**2. The sheer logistical challenges of raising kids in a place that is anything but kid friendly.** There is a level of exhaustion - physical but perhaps more significantly mental and emotional (what experts are now calling “invisible” labor) that we need to take into account when organizing our lives with children in a city. The bottom line is that we need to make room for a lot more margin if we are going to have the energy for our families to thrive in Christ rather than just survive as Angelenos.

**3. The educational landscape is more difficult to navigate.** This is one of the huge contributors to the increased mental labor and it's a deep concern that many people have about the “Babylon” that we live in. The question of public versus private and/or parochial schools, not to mention home-schooling is an ongoing one that Christians in the city need to consider - and there are various ways that different faithful Christian parents have navigated it. There are differences of thought and calling about whether we “isolate vs. inoculate” our kids to culture as well of course differences of opportunities based on means, neighborhoods and the like. Thus, since it is absolutely not a “one size fits all” answer, it takes that much more investigation and discernment to come to some basic decisions about one of the most essential and influential aspects of our children's lives.

## Advantages

**1. Children grow up believing that they live in the real world.** Teenagers who grow up in the suburbs—or in any place usually considered to be “good to raise children”—are usually desperate to get out by the time they reach 18, and go and live in “the real world.” Teenagers who grow up in cities, on the other hand, are confident that they already do, and this means that the faith challenges they face when/if they leave home are dramatically diminished.

**2. Children grow up believing that their parents live in the real world, and that their faith works there.** Keller quotes research to the effect that children who walk away from Christianity typically do so because they don't think their parents understand the way the world is, whereas children who stay in the faith are those who can see that their parents “live in the real world.” Living in a city doesn't remove all your problems (!), but it does make it difficult for children to dismiss their parents as ignorant of how things truly are. This undercuts one of the most common objections to Christian belief that older teens have.

**3. Children can grow up with more confidence, independence and self-reliance.** This is pretty undeniable when you compare an urban child with a suburban child, I think (although interestingly, a genuinely rural upbringing can often produce the same result).

**4. Children grow up handling diversity well.** Ethnic and cultural diversity is inescapable in the city, and this trains children how to handle it well from a very young age. A lot of young people who lose their faith after leaving home (if they do) find that the fundamental challenge is one of handling differences: they are suddenly surrounded by people who make them think about things very differently from the way they have grown up to think. Cities give teenagers that lesson years earlier, while their parents are still around to help them process it.

**5. The family is pushed closer together.** This is partly a function of the lack of space, and partly of the density of local services, but parents and children who live in the same space are forced to spend time together in a way that is far less common in larger, more spacious properties with playrooms and pools and just a lot more square footage! This intensity can form closer relationships and statistics do tell us that the ongoing healthy connection between children and parents is one of the key factors in their faith development. Living in an urban environment helps facilitate this.

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**6. Teenagers grow up with Christian role models other than just their parents.** In many suburban churches, the people from whom 16-17 year olds learn how to do life are other 16-17 year olds, who are not always the most mature examples; people in their early twenties have mostly left to go and live in cities. In cities, while there are probably fewer teenagers, there are an awful lot more hip young twenties, and these are the people whom older teens see living the Christian life and demonstrating what it looks like to be young, contemporary, cool and passionate about Jesus. This can greatly help their discipleship at an important stage.

**7. You can help your kids process things in the real world while they are still under your roof** Irather than sending them off to college to figure it out on their own: as Keller puts it, in the city you get to go to College with your children at 15, instead of sending them away to it at 18. This really helps them handle it (and you handle them!) well.

**8. Children face far less pressure to conform.** An awful lot of teenagers are stifled by the expectation to conform, because there is a type, or narrow range of types, that most people in their community “fit”; this is why the first year at college so often involves self-reinvention. Yet cities are so wildly diverse that there is no one type, and no real pressure to conform to it. This can be liberating, releasing young people to be themselves and in turn allowing kids who want to follow Jesus, more space to find their people and live out their faith.

## Conclusion:

As we mentioned above and need to say again, anyone coming to Christ is fundamentally an act of God and an act of grace - there are no formulas. However, Pastor Keller notes that there are basically 3 things that come to bear on someone becoming a Jesus follower:

1. The influence of Holy Spirit
2. A nurturing ecosystem/environment
3. The choices made by that individual

These three factors must inform our parenting and discipling of our children and boiled down, we believe it comes to the following:

### 1. PRAY

**2. Be deliberate about the discipleship ecosystem you are creating for your family - at home and in your community.** This article is meant to encourage you that it's POSSIBLE, now please see the attached notes and/or links from the Vintage Family ministry for more resources and hopefully more encouragement!

**3. PRAY some more and stay connected to your kids as they navigate the choices in their lives.** 75% of the time we spend with our kids in our lifetime will be spent by age 12! The cliché that “the days are long but the years are short” is a reality, so enjoy the lives entrusted to your care as we join together and seek to declare the love of God in Christ to the next generation.

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