

Announce tenth child. Thank Jim, Dave, and others here at that time. We will be – literally – eternally grateful to you all.

Katie and I try to get away together just the two of us once per year. We had a great trip to Georgia last week but are glad to be back. I appreciate Ed preaching for me.

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Should We Have Children in Worship?*"

Some time back the elders and I talked about having a sermon explaining why we generally do things as families. I wanted to have that sermon now before getting back into Luke to prevent another interruption.

I have thought about this message for years and probably should have preached it earlier. Typically, churches have position papers explaining their view of certain topics. Think of this as a position sermon on having children in worship.

Let me illustrate what I hope to do with this message...

Growing up I played soccer, basketball, and baseball. When I got into junior high and high school I switched to football, wrestling, and track. When I was an elementary schoolteacher, I coached high school and junior high wrestling, and elementary school flag football and girls basketball.

In all my experience playing and coaching, I found that one coach receives by far the most criticism, and that's a football coach. The reason is play calling. Whatever plays the coach calls there will always be fans convinced the coach should have called another play instead.

Where's my brother-in-law, DJ? Is that right?

Katie and I attended a small school. There were less than twenty guys on the football team, which meant that if you had a pulse, you probably played offense, defense, and special teams.

On offense I played running back and I had my own thoughts about the play calling. There were times I thought it would have been better if the coach called a different play.

But then something happened that changed everything for me. I overheard the coach explaining the play calling. He said, "*We run this play to set up this play. Then we run this play to set up this play. And if they respond this way, then we run this play, but if they respond this way, then we run this play.*"

And just like that I understood what our coach was doing, why he was doing it, and it became easy to support his vision.

That is what I hope to do with this sermon. I would like you to be able to understand what we are doing having children in the worship service, why we are doing it, and hopefully it will be easy for you to support that vision as well.

Now let me explain why the elders and I thought this sermon is necessary...

We all tend to be convinced of whatever we first experience. This is why:

- People who are raised Buddhist typically stay Buddhist
- People who are raised Mormon typically stay Mormon
- People who are raised Pentecostal typically stay Pentecostal

And the list goes on.

If you go into many churches across the nation, the norm is for parents and children to be separated for most church events and activities:

- There is a worship service, and the kids are removed for children's church.
- There is a midweek service, and the children go to youth group.

Because this is so common, it is what many people are first exposed to. They become convinced it is right because it is all they know.

It can almost require a paradigm shift for people who have never thought about church any other way. It's not that they are opposed to having children in worship, it's just that they've never seen it differently so it's not on their radar.

Many people might be surprised to know two things:

1. First, it was the norm throughout most of church history for families to worship together.
 2. Second, it is the norm throughout most of the rest of the world today for families to worship together.
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I shared with you before that we are part of a Christian hospitality network called, "[A Candle in the Window](#)." We highly recommend it.

The first family to stay with us was a Chinese family who came to the United States so the father, Peter, could receive pastoral training and return to China to plant churches. We loved our time with them, and I appreciated him sharing about church life in China so much that I entertained having him share with us during Sunday school. I hoped his sharing would help all of us, myself included, understand what church looks like outside of our country.

They ended up surprising us on a recent Sunday night at evening service and I asked Peter if he would share, which he did, and it was a blessing.

One of the things he mentioned is that he had always seen children in worship until coming to the United States.

You've heard me talk before about my friend, Cary Green, who pastors a church up north in Lake Stevens. Cary and his wife, Lois, were missionaries in Germany. They came to the United States when they were told they could no longer homeschool. I've enjoyed listening to them share about church life in Germany, and they said the same that children are in worship. This is why they came and planted a family-integrated church in WA.

Now with that said, even if the norm throughout human history and throughout the world today is having children in worship, that's not what we should base our decision on.

We want to answer this the same way we attempt to answer everything: What does God's Word say?

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: In the Bible, children were present when (part one) rejoicing.

I wanted to keep this to two sermons, so we are not looking at an exhaustive list. And to minimize flipping around we will move through the verses in Scripture in order.

Let's begin with **Deuteronomy 16:10**...

Deuteronomy 16:10 Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you. 11a And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, YOU AND YOUR SON AND YOUR DAUGHTER.

They were to celebrate the feast of weeks as families with their sons and daughters present.

Skip to **verse 13**...

Deuteronomy 16:13 "You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. 14b You shall rejoice in your feast, YOU AND YOUR SON AND YOUR DAUGHTER.

They were also supposed to celebrate the Feast of Booths with their children present.

The next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: In the Bible, children were present when (part two) God's Word was read.

Turn to the right to **Deuteronomy 31**. Moses is going to read the law to the nation. Look at **verse 12**...

Deuteronomy 31:12 Assemble the people, men, women, AND LITTLE ONES, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law,

Moses wanted everyone, including the children, present while the law was read.

Now listen to this...

There is a Hebrew word for children: *bēn* (pronounced bane). But the Hebrew word for **little ones** is *tap̄* (pronounced taff) and it means, “little children.” The point is, we are not talking about teenagers or even older children. We are talking about toddlers.

Look at **verse 13**...

Deuteronomy 31:13 and that THEIR CHILDREN, who have not known it, MAY HEAR AND LEARN TO FEAR THE LORD YOUR GOD, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

Notice that twice, in verses 12 and 13, it says that the children **may hear [God’s Word and come] to fear [Him]**, The Amplified adds **and worship Him** as a result.

I want you to see this, because there is an unfortunate and unbiblical belief that children can’t hear and understand God’s word. The idea is they’re too young to understand or pay attention.

But this is a strong declaration about God’s Word working and transforming them.

Moses was confident God’s Word would go out, wash over these children, and cause them to fear God. We should have the same confidence:

- We are not confident because we think our children are so smart and can understand everything. Our confidence is not in them.
- We are confident because of God’s Word. We know it is powerful and can change their hearts.

I know many of you would testify to this, because over the years you have shared with me wonderful truths your children have learned from the sermons. Some of you have even shared with me things your children learned that you didn’t catch. I have become convinced that many of the children are listening better than their parents :-).

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Turn to the next book, **Joshua 8:35**.

Joshua read the law, and everyone of all ages was present...

Joshua 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, AND THE LITTLE ONES (this is the same Hebrew word for little children), and the sojourners who lived among them.

Again, we see God’s word read and even the youngest were present.

It says **not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read**. This means the Pentateuch, or what we know as the first five books of the Bible. I can’t imagine what people would say today if all this was read with kids present...

“I’m sorry, but this isn’t going to work. My kids are going to be bored. They’ll never understand. They can’t sit still. This will go over their heads. Where are all the games?”

The next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: In the Bible, children were present when (part three) seeking the Lord.

Turn to **2 Chronicles 20**. Samuels, Kings, and Chronicles.

We happened to be in this chapter Wednesday night. Jehoshaphat was attacked by many enemies. Look at **verse 1**...

2 Chronicles 20:1 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. **2** Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar” (that is, Engedi). **3** Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

This was a terrifying moment. It could’ve looked like the Jews were done for. We are told **Jehoshaphat was afraid**.

He decided to seek the Lord. This might seem like a time to keep the children away, but look at **verse 13**...

2 Chronicles 20:13 Meanwhile all Judah stood before the Lord, **WITH THEIR LITTLE ONES** (this is the same Hebrew word for little children), their wives, and their children.

Jehoshaphat wanted all the children present while seeking the Lord.

The next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: In the Bible, children were present when (part four) confessing sin.

Turn to the next book of the Bible to **Ezra 10**.

Ezra 10:1 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, **A VERY GREAT ASSEMBLY OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN**,

gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. 2 And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.

Ezra brought the people together to confess the sin of marrying Gentiles.

If you had to choose one time you would expect the children NOT to be present this would be it, because the children didn't contribute to the sin. But Nehemiah still wanted them present for this time of corporate confession.

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Turn one book to the right to **Nehemiah 12:43**.

The context is they finished building the wall around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 12:43 And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ALSO REJOICED. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

Another example of rejoicing, and everyone was present, including the children.

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Turn to **Psalm 148**: Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms.

This Psalm is about praising the Lord as you can tell by the beginning of many of the verses. Look at **verse 12...**

Psalm 148:12 Young men and maidens together, old men AND CHILDREN! 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.

The psalmist called the people together to praise the Lord, and the children were expected to be there.

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The next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: In the Bible, children were present when (part five) repenting.

You don't have to turn there but I want share from **Joel 2**.

This chapter is famous because Peter quoted it on the day of Pentecost. It describes the great and terrible Day of the Lord. Right after that, the people are called to repentance so they can avoid this great and terrible day...

Joel 2:12 The Lord declares, “Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

The people are called to repent, and listen to whom Joel expects to be present...

Joel 2:15 Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY (keep that in mind); 16 gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; GATHER THE CHILDREN, EVEN NURSING INFANTS.

Joel even commanded the nursing babies to be at this **solemn assembly**.

And I want to make a point about this...

You might hear people argue that we shouldn't have children in worship, because it is a **solemn assembly**. They will make noise and be a distraction. But even in Scripture when we see a **solemn assembly**, God still said to **gather the children, even nursing infants**.

So, as I have said many times before...

We love to have infants in worship. We know they will make noise. That is fine with us. We try to leave the foyer free for nursing mothers, or anyone for that matter – whether mother, father, sibling, or helpful young lady – who wants to help with a crying baby. And if mothers are uncomfortable nursing in the foyer, we have the nursery available and we are working on getting the service streaming on the television in there.

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Listen to William Bradford's 1623 Thanksgiving Proclamation...

“All ye Pilgrims with your wives and little ones (emphasis mine), do gather at the Meeting House, on the hill...there to listen to the pastor, and render Thanksgiving to the Almighty God for all His blessings.”

William Bradford wanted his people to live according to God's Word. His quote sounds like the verses we read, because he saw that as the pattern in the Bible.

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The next lesson...

Lesson Two: We want to foster a positive view of children.

I've heard terrible stories of women who shared that they were pregnant and they received worldly responses making fun of them and discouraging them from having more children. But the responses weren't from worldly coworkers or neighbors. They were from people in the church.

We don't want that sort of attitude here. Instead, we want to view children the way they're presented in Scripture. Probably the most well-known passage...

Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Because Scripture presents children so positively, we should view them very positively.

Something sweet happened this past week...

We wanted to surprise our kids this morning at church with the announcement about Katie's pregnancy, so we didn't share it with any of them. I took the youngest kids with me to Walmart on Friday to get groceries, pick up Katie's Zofran prescription, and get some haircuts. Some of you might have noticed that George was starting to look a lot more like Georgina.

I asked Jake and Kelli if I could share this. There was a Wednesday night recently when Abigail was heading out the back doors of the Fellowship Hall and Jake started yelling to her to stop: "Abigail, Abigail, get back here."

Kelli said, "Jake, that's George!"

I thought, "We've been busy, but it's time to get this boy a haircut."

Zofran is the medication Katie takes for her nausea. We were in line at the pharmacy and one of my sons looks at me and says with a smile, "*Why are you getting Zofran for Mommy? Is she pregnant?*"

I couldn't really keep it from him at that point. When I told him the news, he got emotional. Then I got emotional. Then the pharmacist got emotional. Then everyone in Walmart got emotional.

I did grab my son and pull his head toward my shoulder and we both stood there looking like a couple of babies. You'd think this was the first time we've had a baby or something. Apparently, it's not getting any less exciting for us.

My whole point in sharing this...

Because Scripture has such a high view of children:

- I have always wanted my children to have a high view of children...and cry in Walmart when they hear their mom is pregnant
- And I have always wanted the church I pastor to have a high view of children

And one of the best ways to facilitate this is to have children around. It's hard to grow in our appreciation for children if we're always sending them away.

I've only shared Old Testament verses. Next week we are going to look at New Testament verses, because I couldn't fit them in this sermon.

For now, I want to be clear about two things:

1. First, the Bible contains a consistent pattern of having children in worship.
2. Second, there is no pattern, or even examples, of children being separated from worship.

Now let me share one common argument I've heard because it could be an argument you've heard...

“Scripture doesn't forbid children from worshiping separately, and if it was that big of a deal God would forbid it, so it must not be forbidden...and therefore we can have children worship separately.”

This is known as an argument from silence, and it is a poor way to argue, especially over spiritual matters:

- We shouldn't try to build arguments from what Scripture DOESN'T say.
- We should build arguments from what Scripture DOES say.

Let me illustrate this with one of the main arguments FOR homosexual marriage...

When people want to argue FOR homosexual marriage, they will often say something like, “Jesus never condemned homosexuality.”

And this is true!

You can read through the Gospels and Jesus condemned LOTS of sins – covetousness, hypocrisy, adultery, lust, murder – but He didn't condemn homosexuality...directly.

He condemned homosexuality indirectly by defining what marriage is...

Matthew 19:5 [Jesus] said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?

Jesus didn't have to condemn every perverse relationship man could come up with, such as bestiality, incest, and homosexuality. Instead, He simply and concisely defined marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman, which condemns everything that doesn't fit that definition.

One reason I wanted to mention this, even though it might seem like a detour from the sermon, is we were near Atlanta last weekend. The pastor of the church, Dan Miller, who I think is a godly man has been doing his best to stand up to Andy Stanley, whose gone off the deep end, and whose mega church is in Atlanta. Some of you might have seen some of Andy's pro-homosexual comments recently.

Dan shared with us that this is only the beginning of Andy leading a large pro-homosexual agenda across the nation. When you hear people support homosexual marriage by pointing out that Jesus never condemned homosexual marriage, I hope you are equipped to respond.

The other reason I mention this is I wanted to give you an example of how NOT to build theological arguments: from silence.

In other words, just because Scripture doesn't forbid separating children from parents for worship should not be used as a defense for separating children from parents for worship.

Now let me bring some balance to this...

I'm not comparing homosexuality with removing children from worship. In fact, I'm trying to make the point that they are NOT presented similarly in Scripture:

- Scripture condemns homosexuality in numerous places.
- But Scripture does not condemn children being separated for worship.

So, we can condemn homosexuality because the Bible condemns homosexuality. But we can't condemn children being separated during worship, because the Bible does not condemn children being separated during worship.

This means that as much as I want to have children in worship, we shouldn't hold this as tightly as we hold other things...and this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Having children in worship is not an essential.

In Scripture, the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. While I think we should have children in worship, and I hope you were able to see the biblical pattern, I don't see it emphasized like I see prayer, forgiveness, repentance, and service emphasized.

Here are two mistakes we can make with Scripture:

1. First, failing to strongly address topics that Scripture strongly addresses ...such as homosexuality.
2. Second, strongly addressing topics that Scripture does NOT strongly address...such as having children in worship

And this is one of those topics that I have seen people address too strongly. I've met people who almost seem to elevate having children in worship with the gospel. They act like if churches will have children in worship the church then everything in the church will be perfect.

This simply isn't true. As much as I love having children in worship, it's not the gospel, and it's not going to save our children.

It would be better to have children out of the worship service hearing the gospel, than having children in worship without the gospel.

Second, because this is not an essential issue, when I describe our church, I typically say, “We generally do things as families,” versus, “We do everything as families.”

For example, here are some things we’ve done, or are doing, that I like even though they wouldn’t be considered family integrated:

- We’ve had “Moms Nights Out.”
- We have the upcoming Above Rubies retreat, which Katie is attending with some ladies in the church.
- We have our upcoming ladies’ conference.
- There is a Saturday morning men’s group.
- We’ve had men’s breakfasts.
- Most obviously, we have Sunday school before the worship service. Some parents keep their children with them while other parents enjoy their kids going to different classes.

Similarly, we will never have the typical youth group, but I’m glad to see our young people doing things together. I like the frisbee on Sundays after potluck...although I think some adults play too?

I’m glad my kids have friends their ages that they play with.

I’m glad my kids get invited to other people’s houses and we are glad to have other kids over to our house. We never tell people, *“Because we are family integrated your whole family has to come over versus only a few of your kids, or because we are family integrated you better invite our whole family versus only a couple of our kids. If you can’t have all thirteen of us over, you’re out of luck. That’s right, my mom lives with us now, so she’s part of the deal. It is thirteen or zero. You choose.”*

And I want to take a moment to exhort the young people...

In many churches the youth group is the place young people go to make friends. Because we don’t have a youth group, you need to be more intentional and invite people into your circle. Invite them to play with you, sit with you, go places with you.

Let me conclude with this...

Hebrews 12:2 Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Keeping our focus on Christ and what He has done for us will allow us to grow closer:

- To our physical family members
- To our spiritual family members
- And most importantly to Christ Himself

This is what will ultimately allow us to have a church that pleases Him.

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If you have any questions about anything I have shared in the sermon or I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front after service, and I would consider it a privilege to speak with you. Let's pray.