

Toward a Youth Ministry Philosophy, #1

Youth Ministry

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, June 3, 2018

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Today we're pivoting into something else and we're just going to spend a couple of weeks on a topic of immense practical import for the life of our church. This is not a message speaking so much to those that are in trials or anything like that but it's something that affects every one of us in the life of Truth Community Church and we want to explain some things that kind of explain what you see. With so many new families in our church that have come within the past few months, it's important for them that we address this topic. For those of you that have been with us for a long time and maybe haven't really understood exactly why things are done, it's important for us to consider this matter that will consume our attention this week and next week and also the following Tuesday afterwards.

What we want to do over these next couple of days, and when I say days, it's funny, I just think about my life in terms of the days that I preach and tomorrow means the next time that I preach, even if that's two or three weeks away. It's just the mind of this particular preacher. You can pray for me about that, I guess. But what we want to do today is to lay out a consideration of how we think and how we consider children and youth ministry, more particularly in the context of what we do here at Truth Community Church. This is a message that is very critical for young families but it's also important for those of us who like me and Nancy, you know, we've pretty much raised our family. We're almost through that but it's important for us to understand corporately as a church what it is and how it is and why it is, most importantly, that we do things the way that we do when it pertains to our young people, from the little children all the way through those that are in high school and all of that. What we do is there is a lot of thought and thinking that goes behind it.

Now before I go any further, let me say this, is that in times past we have preached on parenting and raising children from a biblical perspective, this is a little bit different than that. I'm not going to emphasize what I'm about to say but it is critical and everything presupposes this. It's important for you to understand, us to understand as a church, you to understand as parents of young children, those of you that are adults but are just involved in the life of the church, Scripture places the responsibility for the spiritual upbringing of children upon the parents. Fathers, raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. It is the preeminent priority of parents to provide for the spiritual care of their children. The church comes alongside, the church has a place to play in that,

but day to day responsibility for that lies on parents not upon the church, and if you can understand that, then you will go a long way toward becoming the kind of parent that you want to be.

You know, I remember my beloved grandmother who has been gone for 30 some years now, dear Hazel, she told me one time that she spoke from a different perspective and from a different generation, she was lamenting some different things and she said, "I want you to know that I didn't just send my children to church, I took them to church." Well, very good for my grandmother to do that but she didn't have an awareness or a concept that raising children to live for the Lord is something that is done on a 24/7 basis, is done in the details of life as Deuteronomy 6 says, you know, when you stand up, when you sit down, when you walk about. So it is a mistake of incalculable proportions, it is a mistake of great consequence for parents to look and to try to delegate to the church the responsibility for the spiritual nurture and care of their children because Scripture places that responsibility on parents. Parents are the ones who are with children to be able to raise them. Parents are the ones who have the authority to discipline children when they need correction. That is not given to the church and there is a good reason for that. It belongs to the parents. Now with all of that said, there is out in the lobby to kind of cover this aspect of parenting, this CD album called "The Parenting Call." It's brand-new. It has a series of messages that we have preached. Those are available for you to take and to avail yourselves of to get that kind of grounding on parenting and the role of parents. That is available and everything that we say here will presuppose those things and the role of parents in what we're about to do.

What we're talking about now here today is how do we think about the church's role in the life of young people, and we could just title this message and next week's message, this is "Toward a Youth Ministry Philosophy." This is not the final word on youth ministry philosophy but it gives you the direction and it gives you the guiding principles and the biblical reasoning and the thinking that is behind why we do what we do. And I can tell you, I say this without rancor, without any kind of apology on the one hand or regret or resentment on the other hand, there have been many families who have come to our church, see how we do things and they do a U-turn out the door because we don't give them what they are looking for in a church. Well, God bless them. That's okay. There is no sense of animosity to that but I want you to understand, it's crucial for us to understand that we do things like we do for a reason. There is thought behind it that we believe is grounded in Scripture and that's what we want to lay out today. Why does Truth Community Church approach youth ministry the way that it does? That's what we want to talk about here today.

Now, let's start with this. What a blessing to have dozens of people under the age of 18 that are with us here today. I think that's great. I love that. I love preaching to young people in this kind of context. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 127 and here is a guiding, defining principle for why we do what we do and the way that we think about youth ministry the way that we do. In Psalm 127:3 it says,

3 Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. 5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Scripture declares that children are a gift from God and the primary reference here is they are a gift to their parents, I get that, but I want you to understand that as a church we view children that pass through our doors as an unmitigated, unmixed gift and blessing from God, from the youngest infant to the one on the verge of going off to college and beyond that as well but, you know, we are limiting it to that general range. From birth to graduation, we love having young people at Truth Community Church. They are welcome here and we want them here. So we ask this question, then. This question is: well then, what is the philosophy of Truth Community Church as it pertains to so-called youth ministry? What is the philosophy of Truth Community Church as it pertains to youth ministry and I'm going to state this principle simply, I'm going to state it in a positive way, and then over the next couple of Sundays we will flesh this out. Today's message is a disaster homiletically. I would have been flunked in my preaching class at seminary to do what I'm about to do. I'm about to preach for 50 minutes or 60 minutes simply to introduce next Sunday's message. Okay? So understand and bear with me as we kind of lay the foundation for these things that need to be said.

What is our philosophy of youth ministry? It's simply this: our philosophy of youth ministry is to include the youth in the ministry. Our philosophy of youth ministry is to include the youth in the ministry. Here's what I mean by that. We gladly incorporate our youth in the adult life of our church. You could say it that way. We gladly incorporate our youth in the adult life of our church. We want them with us. We like having them with us. They are a blessing to us, we hope we are a blessing to them, and we believe that that is what produces the best long-term discipleship for them. To state it in a negative way and to almost to stand in a measure of isolation from what happens around us in a lot of other places, to state it in a negative way: we disagree with a ministry model that separates youth from adults in the primary gatherings of the church. Some of you have come from churches like that where you arrived at the door and the children went one way, you went another way, and three hours later you gathered together after having been apart all of that time. We don't agree with that approach. We do not think that that is the way that Scripture points us to consider children in the gathering of the people of God. So we can state it positively and briefly in another way. Youth ministry at Truth Community Church has an active but subordinate position in what we do. We do not exist in order to entertain young people. That's not why we're here. Even if we thought that was a good idea, we wouldn't be able to compete with the multimillion dollar budgets that try to make that happen in other places with bigger facilities and bigger staff. So we're not even trying to do that. They are not even competition, if you want to think about it that way, because we are trying to do something completely different, separate and distinct from that.

And when I say youth ministry has an active but subordinate position in our church, for those of you that are new to us or have maybe forgotten, there are multiple avenues for

young people to be involved in the life of our church that are provided on either a regular basis or on a repeated basis. We have separate choirs for children and for older youth that meet on a weekly basis after the service, led by faithful people like Ruth Lacey and the Conley's for the older young people, and from time to time those young people, those children will participate in our morning service. They will come up and they will sing during the morning service, having prepared, having diligently been disciplined for that moment, they are prepared and they are here and they give to the life of our church through what they do. I love that. I love it. We have periodic youth fellowships for some of the older youth including one coming up just next week on Friday, June 15, opportunities for fellowship on this particular one, Andrew Snelling will be teaching on worldview issues to them. Our young people, most of you won't be aware of this, our young people in the teenage years have been warmly welcomed among the adults in the fundamentals of the faith class being taught by our brother, Brian Braxton, who opened the service for us today. I say all of those things simply to help you see and understand that there is a devoted attention by faithful adults to the care and development of young people within the context of our church. It doesn't look like what people are used to seeing in other places but it's important for you to see and to realize and to know that that exists and is a conscious part of our ministry.

That said, that said, we do not practice age-segregated programs as an ongoing part of our church life. We do not establish a so-called children's church where the young people are funneled out when the preaching begins and carried off into another place. We think that's a serious mistake of philosophy. We do not practice age-segregated Sunday schools and things like that even though we have other means of things for them, and we want to be conscious of the effect that that has when people come from outside and recognize, start to see what's going on. For some people, that is revolutionary. They have never seen anything like this before. They have no concept, no prism, no paradigm by which to interpret that and they have accepted as normal beforehand a model that I described earlier where children and their parents are taken in different places in different directions when they come to church.

Well, this message and the ones that will follow in future days are designed to set forth our thinking to clarify body life here at Truth Community Church, and let me just, again, state my intentions here clearly from the beginning. Our goal today is not to forbid youth programs in the future necessarily. Our goal today is certainly not to start programs for the youth today. That's not the point. This isn't about what kind of meetings we're going to have for young people going forward from here. That's not the point. You see, what happens is, and I say this without fear of being legitimately contradicted, churches just run in and say what kind of activities are we going to start without giving any thought to the prior philosophy that informs why it should be done. They just kind of look around and say, "Well, this is what everybody else is doing. This is what I did as a kid," and it's just replicated without asking prior questions about why are we doing what we're doing and is there a better way in which to take care of the eternal souls of these young people that have been given to us. So our goal today is just to set forth guiding principles from Scripture why do we think the way that we think.

One last bit of introduction to my introduction to the messages that will come later. It may be important to make one thing clear at the outset because this question comes up from time to time, and as these messages go out beyond our walls, it's very important to make this point clear. Truth Community Church is not part of what has become known as the family integrated church movement. I have a lot of respect for some of the leaders in that movement. I appreciate what they've done. I've benefited from their thinking but we are not associated with that movement. Friends in the family integrated church movement may find many points of agreement with what we say and what we do here but they should not assume that we are like-minded in all ways. The stricter versions of FIC, as I'll call them just for the sake of time, stricter versions of them would not even use nurseries. Well, we have a nursery for children from birth through three years old. So they would find that maybe we agree, maybe we don't. This is not a message to identify ourselves with any other movement. This is just what we do here in what the Lord has given to us here. Now, opponents of the FIC movement may disagree with our philosophy, and I know for a fact that some of them, if not many of them do, but they should not lump us together with the FIC movement which we do not claim as our own. So that's for the benefit of those who are acquainted with those issues.

So we are not a family integrated church, on the other hand and this is the part that I want to handle with a lot of care and love and respect, on the other hand, we differ from many churches, even those churches that we consider to be close friends of ours on the priority of so-called youth ministry. We differ from them and we want to say and acknowledge and affirm that our friends have good motivations in what they do. We are not here to divide from them, and the better ones who are youth ministry should not be lumped together with other churches who are driven by entertaining youth just trying to build the biggest audience possible. There is such a broad spectrum of the different ways that things are associated that it would be a travesty to lump everyone together in the same pot, if I can mix a metaphor like that. We love these friends that have come to different conclusions than we have. We do not make this a point of separation. So we are not here to try to tell other people what they need to do, we're simply explaining what we do and why we do it for the sake of our local body, for the sake of us to understand because we believe that this will help us going forward and we believe that it will build even greater unity when there is a sense of understanding of why we do what we do. So this is for within the walls of Truth Community Church but we realize that there are other considerations that made those qualifications important.

What can we say about youth ministry, then, going forward? What can we say about the way it's been practiced in the recent past over the past few decades? One writer said this, that it was in the early 1970's that churches began hiring youth pastors and tried to attract teenagers with food and live music, and with the emergence of the cable or the channel MTV, I hardly even remember what MTV stands for, Music Television, I think, with the emergence of MTV and their videos in the 1980's, church youth ministry became more entertainment driven with live bands and video production, and biblical teaching to those groups was simplified and shortened to accommodate an entertainment saturated youth culture. This is what they're used to. This is what they respond to. We'll make our services like them, in other words. We'll make it like what they see out in the culture.

Now, those things like anything else with sophisticated entertainment, sophisticated multimedia, you can draw an audience with that. We recognize that and many would point to large attendance numbers in their youth ministry and declare them a success, vindicate the method by the results and say, "Therefore what we do has been vindicated." But when you look deeper, when you consider what is actually happening after youth ministry, maybe we shouldn't be so quick to congratulate ourselves on what we're doing. According to researchers and there have been a lot of polls and different surveys taken to support this, just summarizing it, according to researchers between 70 – listen to these numbers. This to me is frightening. This makes me tremble before the throne of God what I'm about to read to you. According to researchers between 70 and 88% of so-called Christian teenagers leave the church by their second year in college. Whatever is happening in those kinds of youth ministries and when it is the predominant way of doing things, we need to look at this and say whatever else is happening, their target audience is not being convinced. They are not being converted. They are not being prepared for the philosophies that encounter them at institutions of higher learning. And we look at that and say just on a preliminary basis, we look at that and we reach this conclusion, that our church is not obligated to or in any way beholden to that model that produces those kinds of results. We think that's foolish to just say just because that's the way others do it, therefore we should do it the same way. The other nations have a king, we want a king also. We don't think that way here and, beloved, more importantly when I say we are not beholden to that model or those results, there is another aspect to this that we consider even more important than that. When you realize, I don't know if you've ever thought this way. I think about this kind of stuff a lot. When you realize that Scripture says nary a word about that kind of model for youth ministry, nary a word about the office of youth pastor, then you have to step back and say, "Do you know what? Maybe we should start afresh and build from the ground up here and think about what we're doing and what's going on here." And it's interesting, you know, I've heard messages from prominent prominent youth pastors who freely admit what I just said. There is nothing about youth ministry in Scripture. Wow, really? Then on what point does that become a dogmatic basis upon what churches should do going forward?

So we think that for the life at Truth Community Church, Scripture points a different way and I want to state this for you. I like putting things in simple direct sentences as best as I can as often as I can to help you think this way and to understand what it is that we're saying. We believe that Scripture points to a pattern of ministry in which young people learn the faith among the adults, not apart from them. Young people learn the faith among the adults, not apart from them and that's what I want to spend some time going on now as we pivot, and what we're going to do today and next week is we're going to look at children among the people of God from three different perspectives: children in the Old Testament, children with Jesus, and children in the New Testament, and we just want to look at what the Bible sometimes almost incidentally describes as the place that children have over the course of the history of the people of God. As we look at that, then we want to say, "Okay, how can we best identify with that within the realm that God has given us? Within the size of the church that the Lord has given to us and blessed us with,

what is it, what could we draw from those general observations that would give us a pattern going forward?" And that is what we have tried to do over the past few years.

And let me just say this by way of further introduction, you might say, an introduction upon an introduction and a tangent from the secondary and tertiary introductions. I'm in a lot of trouble here. When we started Truth Community Church six and a half years ago down the road 30 miles, one of the first questions that we were getting from the very start is, "When are you going to start a youth ministry? When are you going to start a youth ministry?" And over time, you know, those questions kind of dissipated as people started to enjoy the presence of having their children with them alongside them in worship and seeing it. You know, it's just kind of unfolded that way in the early years, and by the way, it's helpful to remember, Truth Community Church is a very young church. We're only six years old and so what churches are able to do that are 50 and 70 and 80 years old differs from what a church at our young age is able to do and what we want to do along with that. But think with me here. It's so difficult sometimes to get people to think about what matters. not addressing that to you here in this room but just speaking in general. What matters when it comes to the way that we deal with our children and what we try to accomplish, and when I say "our children," the children of the families that attend Truth Community Church, let me just open my heart and just put the bare nature of it on the table and if you step on it and reject it, so be it. What matters, what matters in ministering to children are the things of eternal consequence. What matters is that they would be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ so that they would live in heaven forever. Eternal things matter, not whether the child happens to be excited about what happens on any given Sunday morning for him. To simply cater to wanting to entertain a child on Sunday morning according to what he does the other six days of the week is a colossal mistake. It is so narrow focused as if the only thing mattered that was Johnny had a good time on Sunday morning. Or if we got more candid about it, that Johnny's parents were able to get a break from Johnny for three or four hours on Sunday morning. Those aren't lofty motives, beloved. That's not enough and just speaking from the perspective of time and space and speaking about the people of God, beloved, here's what matters, speaking within that context, what matters is that young people are given a foundation to help them deal with the philosophies of life that come to them after they move beyond the realm of the influence and protection of the Christian home. What matters is that young people would learn through their involvement in their early years about what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be committed to a local church; for them to understand that the church does not exist to entertain them and that they would come and that they would grow up with an understanding and a development that says, "I have a responsibility as a professing Christian to contribute to the life of the local church, to minister God's people with my skills and talents and my presence and my love." So that, and so, you see, we're looking at what happens 20 years from now when no one is going to be around to trace it back to today. We want to cultivate people that have a love for the local church, that have a love for the people of God and know how to express that in inter-generational ways and contexts. In that sense, the fruit of our youth ministry will be judged after I'm gone to heaven, you know, when young people like you over here to my right are in positions of leadership, positions of service in the church, and there is a group of elders someplace who realize that they have someone trustworthy, devoted to the life

of the local church that they can depend on. That's what I care about. That's what we're ultimately trying to produce is children who become adults who are able to serve effectively to the glory of Christ among his people, and we believe that there is a way for that to be done that is distinct from the way that youth ministry is often accomplished.

Let's look at what Scripture says here. First of all, children in the Old Testament. Children in the Old Testament and I invite you to turn back to the book of Exodus with me, if you will, and what we're going to do here for the rest of our time this morning however long this goes, what we're going to do for the rest of this morning is we're just going to take a quick look at a number of different Old Testament passages that speak about the presence of children among the adults in Old Testament worship, and I want to take the time to go through I don't know how many it is, a half dozen, 10, 12 different passages simply for this purpose, here's why we are doing what we're doing here today: if I simply made a summary statement and said to you that children were present in the worship of Israel, now let's move on to point 2, you wouldn't think it was very important. What sometimes we need to do is that we need to take the time to look at passages individually so that the cumulative impact of what those passages say bring a weight to bear on the way that we think and so we just take the time to go through God's word here this morning to see what it says, to see what kind of direction that it might give to us and help us. We freely acknowledge that what we're looking at here are not passages that are demanding a particular type of youth ministry in the New Testament era, but what we're looking for, what we're seeing, what you'll find is that there is a consistent pattern over millennia, over millennia, over hundreds of years, a thousand years, two thousand years, which we believe is consistent with what we're trying to do here and that matters to us.

So you recall that God called Moses out to lead his people out of Egypt and that Moses had to interact with Pharaoh in order to let the people of Israel go from their slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh, as you know, wasn't too interested in that but Moses was demanding that Pharaoh let the nation depart so that they could worship God according to his law, according to his revealed principles, that they might be a people set apart for him. Here's what I want you to see and I'm going to take you to Exodus 10 if you're not there already: from the very start, Moses had the little ones in mind. From the very start, he had the little ones in mind.

Look at Exodus 10:7. The house of Pharaoh was getting a little bit fed up with Moses and all the plagues that seemed to come from his hands. He was bad news to be around for them and in chapter 10, verse 7,

7 Pharaoh's servants said to [Pharaoh], "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" 8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?" 9 Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." 10 Then he

said to them, "Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind."

Now, in the midst of that colossal confrontation between God's appointed leader, Moses, and the Pharaoh of the greatest nation on earth at that time, what I want you to see, all I want you to see for today's purposes is that in the midst of that conflict Moses had the little ones in mind. "We need to bring our little ones out. They need to be a part of this worship. We, the adults and the little ones are going to go with us." That was present in the mind of Moses therefore present in the mind of God at the very start of the formation of the nation, and in what followed in the appointed rites that God gave to Israel, the appointed feasts that would follow, they were designed in part to encourage questions from the children.

Look at Exodus 12 and this fits with the thing that we were saying earlier about the primary responsibility for the spiritual development of children is on the parents. I know for some of you that's earthshaking and convicting and concerning, but so be it. Exodus 12:25,

25 "When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite [the rite of Passover]. 26 And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' 27 you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the people bowed low and worshiped."

The Passover feast in part was designed to be an educational tool by which the little ones would come to understand the history of their people.

Look at chapter 13, verse 14. It says,

14 "And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 15 It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.'" "

Again, the structure of the feasts of Israel being designed to encourage the questions of children to adults, to their parents, helping them so that they could grow and understand. Understanding that – oh, beloved – understanding that, there would be things on first impression that their little minds could not grasp the significance of, the idea being that there would be something that would prompt interaction so that this child could ask the older one in his life, could ask his parent, what does this mean, and then there is a teachable moment for that to be explained to them and the spiritual significance of the rites that are being observed could be explained to them and in that stage where their

minds are impressionable, where convictions can be installed from the start, the little ones benefited from that which the adults were doing. It's really not that complicated.

The 10 Commandments highlight matters affecting children. Look at chapter 20 of Exodus. Chapter 20, you see the consideration of coming generations in mind as God delivers his moral law in the form of the 10 Commandments. Exodus 20:4,

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Do you see it? Generations in mind with the law being declared here. The fathers, their children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren being in mind, being in focus, being embedded in, you might say, what is being said and taught here.

Look at verse 9, again, just the consideration of young people in what is being said. Let's start in verse 8,

8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."

The children being considered right in the declaration of the law as it is given to the nation for the first time.

Then in verse 12 which is, of course, picked up in the New Testament, Exodus 20:12,

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you."

Paul picks up on that promise and emphasizes the importance of children obeying their parents in Ephesians 6.

So the idea of children is embedded in these first sayings of Moses to Israel and when he spoke to Israel the last time in his final word to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy, he brings up the children again. They were central to the planned worship of Yahweh.

Look at Deuteronomy 31, beginning in verse 10. Deuteronomy 31:10,

10 Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. 13 Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

Now I've got more as we go further into the Old Testament here to consider but here's what I want you to see, beloved. Some of these things are so simple, so basic, but they have very very far-reaching consequences. The consideration, I'm repeating myself now but that's all right, the consideration that should be uppermost in our mind is what happens to these young people long-term. Where are they going to be in 10, 20, 30 years. What are they going to have to communicate to their children in 20, 30, 40 years. What are they going to be saying then. And you see, we cannot just for the sake of filling a building, we cannot cater to an entertainment model that does not soundly instruct them in the things of Christ just so that they go out and they've had a cool time, and yet they are left ignorant and they are left defenseless when they come upon philosophies later on. We have to think for their well-being. There is not a good parent among you who would let a young child simply determine his own diet and that he could just eat the candy and the cereal and whatever else he wanted. There is not a parent among you that would do that and just let him determine his own diet before he's old enough to understand the consequences of his nutritional choices. Beloved, how much more then, the foolish immature undeveloped minds of these young people? We have to look out for their long-term well-being. We have to look out for what will serve them throughout the world that they don't know is out there but we know is coming.

We have to do what we can to prepare them for that and we cannot be a church, we cannot be a people, that's judged later on by saying they failed their mission. Their young people came out and they were not prepared. They conducted their ministry in a way that they got to the end of high school and they never heard the word of God seriously taught to them. We can't do that! We can't do that. We can't betray the trust of that future generation. We can't bear the thought of standing before the judgment seat of Christ and giving an account for these little ones that for the shortest window of time were given to our spiritual oversight. We can't do that and God willing we won't. There is too much at stake.

As you go on in the Old Testament, as you know the general history of the Old Testament, Joshua, Moses died, Joshua led them into the Promised Land. What happened when he did? Look at Joshua 8:34 for the sake of time, Joshua read all the words of the law, Joshua 8:34,

34 ... [Joshua] read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.

Much later, King Jehoshaphat in a time of national crisis called for a national fast. Look at 2 Chronicles 20, beginning in verse 3.

3 Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah [the southern kingdom]. 4 So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.

Drop down to verse 13.

13 All Judah was standing before the LORD, with their infants, their wives and their children.

The little ones were with them in this time of national crisis. They were with them as the word of God was being read. They were being with them as the adults sought the Lord for a crisis which the little ones could not understand in their undeveloped state. But they were with them.

Then in verse 15, a prophet speaks up and says,

15 ..."Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's.'"

That's what they were hearing.

You know, I don't need to tell you parents who bring your little ones into the service this but it's a good reminder for us that are beyond the years of our young children, those of you that haven't had children, you've probably maybe heard some of this, it's remarkable, it is remarkable how often a five-year-old boy, an eight-year-old girl, will pick up on something that is being said in a message and repeat it in the midst of it. "Oh, he said my name." Or, "Oh, this is what I read about someplace else. This is what we were talking about." Or they repeat the Scripture verse or take little notes in their shaky handwriting. We cannot dismiss that as something that is inconsequential and unimportant simply because it comes from the hands of one undeveloped. When those things are happening, there is the Spirit of God bearing witness to us that they are hearing; that things are settling in their minds, that are coming into their minds even when we wouldn't think. It is a tragedy of great proportions to underestimate what the youngest of children can do when he hears with the measure of simplest understanding, and we feel as a church, we believe as a church, we don't want to squander those teachable moments. We understand

that there are things being driven, that there are pillars being poured in their minds even in those times that are valuable even if they can't be quantified. But their value, their value will be shown years from now when the repeated, consistent, faithful bringing of parents and their children to the worship of God amongst the people of God bears fruit. The value will be shown in the future. We cannot measure it by what we see today.

When you read the Psalms, I didn't jot these references down, maybe I'll refer to them later, it's amazing in the Psalms how often the psalmist refers to, I think one of them is at the end of Psalm 22, how he refers to a generation yet to be born of the things of which I'm speaking now. We just have to have a broader sense of purpose, a broader sense of conviction about the significance of what we're doing rather than thinking it all depends on what an immediate response is today. I beg you to embrace this, not that any of you are opposed to it as far as I know, but we gather together around this and there is a reason why we do it the way we do.

Flash forward one last Old Testament reference to the book of Ezra just before the Psalms in your Bible, before Job I should say. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. Ezra 10:1. And remember, I've got a lot more to say about this next week. This is all introduction so I'm really not even making my point yet. Ezra 10:1. I'll give you a moment. I hear those pages. Ezra 10:1,

1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.

Where were the children when the people gathered together in this mournful time led by Ezra? The children were with the adults. They worshiped and heard the word among the adults and at the risk of preaching next week's message in the next two minutes, you're going to hear it again anyway, so it doesn't matter, what did our Lord do when children were in his midst and the disciples tried to shoo them away? It wasn't the children that received the rebuke of the Lord, it was the disciples. He said, "Don't do that. Don't forbid the children. Let them come to me." He took them into his arms and embraced them. You read the New Testament, you find the New Testament writers addressing children directly in what they say. Ephesians 6, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Well, have you ever considered, have you ever thought, how in the world were the children going to hear that admonition unless they were there when the Apostle Paul's letter was being read? Paul said that because he knew they were going to be there with the adults to hear what he had to say to them specifically.

And beloved, what we're saying here today is not that the way we do it is the only way to do it. We're just explaining why we do what we do. We think that the pattern that you see in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, in the writing of the apostles, is entitled to a weight and deference that points in a direction different from most modern approaches to youth ministry. That's why we do what we do. That's why there are children four years old and up sitting with us on a regular basis. We believe that there is a kind of spiritual

osmosis that takes place. They learn, and again I'm just using all of next week's material now. I've got to stop this. They learn by observation. They learn to be among a people who hear the word of God with reverence. They learn and they watch and they see the eyes of their parents if you're paying attention, they look and they see the eyes of their parents trained on a pulpit to hear the word of God taught. That matters to them. They learn from that. They say, "Oh, this is what I do in response to the word of God, I listen, I pay heed, I sit quietly." Yeah, it's hard for those early months, sometimes years of training them to sit quietly. If they had the means, who would squander the opportunity to invest in the future just by saying, "I want to spend it all now"? In any area of life where anything worthwhile is done, people are thinking about the long-term consequences of what they're doing and we are in the midst of an evangelical culture that just wants to entertain in the moment and can't bear the thought of thinking that the word of God would actually speak to even the youngest of minds.

We're not alone in this. Maybe we're in a minority but I don't care about that, do you? I couldn't care less about that. True, what I've said today was from the Old Testament about the nation of Israel. True, the New Testament church is a distinct entity. But the pattern continues with Jesus and the apostles and we'll see that next time. There's a lot more to say about this, beloved, but we do it differently but it's not because we don't care, we do it differently because we care about these precious souls; we do it differently because we see Scripture pointing us this way and we are going to trust the Lord for the long-term fruit of this, come what may.

Let's pray together. In all that we've said, I would hasten to ask you personally, child and adult alike, simply whether you have found forgiveness of your sins through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Our great Lord made a blood atonement for sinners just like you. He invites you to come to him for forgiveness and eternal life, repenting of sin and putting your faith in him that you might be eternally forgiven and that you might live eternally in heaven when you die. Come to Christ if you do not know him.

Father, we commit all of these things to you. God, God, we pray for these precious little ones, these newborn infants that yet cannot even hear with understanding; the little ones just starting to toddle around and finding their way around a church on a regular basis; others growing in their maturity; starting to get the picture, starting to understand things about Scripture, about sin, about Christ, about their need for forgiveness; seeing a pattern of adults coming together on a regular basis to give honor to you and to give heed to your. Father, we are mindful of that, that there are all kinds of worldly philosophies that will assail them soon enough, we are mindful that there are corruptions within them and corruptions that will come from outside them. We ask you to have mercy on them, Father, and we know that the strong fortress given to us in this age is the word of God and so we ask you to impart your word to our hearts, that you would impart it to their hearts, that you would help us impart it to their hearts that rising up from those that are within this room, these young people, would be rocks for Christ; would be those who stand firm against the storms of opposition; those that give their life to him; that make Christ the preeminent love and focus of their hearts come what may; those who understand that in the 66 books of the Bible is a great treasure to be believed, taught and

defended against all comers. Raise up a generation like that, Lord, and we will gladly submit to how you judge us in the end. Be gracious to us all, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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