



JESUS AND CHILDREN

Part 74 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 18:15–17 | May 22, 2011

LUKE 18:15–17

¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Alrighty Mars Hill, we're in Luke 18:15–17, Jesus and Children. You could find it in your Bible or on your app and as you're doing that, I've got a few quick book plugs for the book table. Today obviously we're talking about Jesus and children, which raises a lot of questions for people about parenting and children. So now here's a few recommendations, “*Shepherding a Child's Heart*,” by Tedd Tripp is a really great book, looks at how to raise children not just with external, moral obedience but inward, heart change. And we appreciate his work a lot. We've got this book on sale for you. He also lectured here at Mars Hill on parenting and all of those lectures in audio and video format are available for free at the marshillchurch.org media library. So you can grab that if you're a parent or grandparent or aspire to be as well.

Nothing's more important than just time in the Bible. That's true for little people and big people. And the kids' Bible we recommend a lot is the “*Jesus Storybook Bible*” and it's a great, simple Bible. It takes some of the more popular primary stories of the Scripture and connects them all to Jesus and does so in a real creative, poetic, and really a great way. And so we recommend this. My kids all enjoyed it. I read it to them when they were little and as they got old enough to read, they started reading it for themselves. This one is a deluxe edition and it's also got the audio version, so your kids can listen to it and they can read and some kids like to do both and sort of follow along, which helps with their reading skills. So we'd recommend the “Jesus Storybook Bible.” And my buddy Calvin, my nine-year-old son, when he was little, “Operation No More Tears” in Isaiah, that was his very favorite in that. I read it a lot. And Alexie liked the “Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Always and Forever Love,” that's their theme through the whole book is God's love for us.

Additionally, “*Long Story Short*” is a great book. It's ten-minute devotionals for parents or grandparents with children. And it's set up every day, read a verse, ask some questions, have some discussions, learn some big truths. It follows the big ideas of the Bible. And this is the kind of book you can have on the dining room table along with a Bible and just have discussions over mealtime with your family. So if you're someone who would like to do that with your kids and/or grandkids, that would be a super helpful resource for you as well. And it's put together by a friend of ours from the Sovereign Grace network, which is a really great Bible-believing network of churches that we appreciate. And so that's a resource from one of their leaders.

INTRODUCTION

That being said, I'm going to pray and we'll see what Jesus has for us today.

Father God, thank you first of all that we get to come to you as Father. Just that in itself is astonishing and amazing. That of all the ways and names by which you could have revealed yourself to us, you chose Father or Daddy. And so Father, as we open the Scriptures today, we thank you that we get to see a moment where Jesus interacted with children, where the Son of God interacted with sons and daughters. And so we invite you, Holy Spirit, to illuminate our understanding of the Scriptures which you have written so that we could learn about Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

THE TIME PASTOR MARK MET BILLY GRAHAM

Let me start with a story. It was something I experienced as a brand-new Christian. God saved me around age nineteen in college. And I was working as a bellhop and shuttle driver, paying my way through school during the summers at a Marriott Hotel.

Being a brand-new Christian called into ministry, one of the people that I respected, appreciated, admired the most and do quite frankly to this day was Billy Graham. I think he's a wonderful man of God, he's been faithful to Jesus and he was faithful to his wife and he's a wonderful man of God. And I've gotten to know his grandson a little bit, a pastor named Tullian who's a really good Bible teacher and a dear friend. And all the stories about Billy as a man off the stage, behind the scenes only confirm the kind of man that he was and is. And that's a fantastic, admirable man of God, somebody I really appreciate, respect, admire a lot.

So it was a big shock for me when I was working at the Marriott, I was walking by the restaurant one morning and I looked over and I thought, "Man, that looks like Billy Graham." But he wasn't sitting there with like bodyguards and people with assault rifles, he was just sitting there reading the paper with thick glasses wearing a Minnesota Twins baseball cap. And I thought, "Well, he is a man of great faith, that could be him." Anyone who roots for the Twins has a lot of faith. And so I thought, "Well, I'm working but I got to go check." So I walked in, I said, "Sir, I hate to interrupt you," which I didn't. That's why I was interrupting him. But, "Sir, I hate to interrupt you," I don't remember exactly what I said. "Are you Billy Graham?" He said, "Yes," in that awesome voice. I freaked out. I was just totally— "You're Billy Graham." This is amazing, sitting here in the Marriott.

I don't remember what I said, but I think I told him something to the effect of, "Hey, I'm a pastor to be, want to be. I'm a new Christian, God's called me to ministry, I want to teach the Bible, plant a church," and he—and I just remember, he was really nice to me. Put his paper down and just visited with me for a few minutes. "Well that's great. "What has God called you to? How can I be praying for you?" Awesome. You've got the bat phone, I mean, I'm sure, you know, you've got the red line. Awesome, please do pray. Awesome. And just really encouraged and I walked away thinking, "Billy Graham just took a moment and was present and loved me and served me and encouraged me," and that meant the world to me.

Then I realized, "Uh-oh, I just outed Billy Graham." Because the next thing I know, everybody in this busy restaurant is, "Is that Billy Graham? I think it is, I think it is Billy Graham." I'm like, "Oh, I just ruined this guy's private breakfast." Next thing you know, everybody's coming over to see Billy Graham and he ends up sitting there like Santa Claus and kids are climbing up on his lap and people are taking over their babies to have him pray for them and meet them. And he's answering their questions and they're all getting their photo taken of their kids with Billy Graham like he's Santa Claus at the mall. And the next thing I know, people are going up to their room and they're stealing the Gideon's Bible and they're bringing it down asking Billy to autograph the stolen Bible—which is awesome. And I had to make the drives to the airport and so I kept checking back. "Oh, there's a big line, it's a big party."

The next thing I know, all the employees are hanging out with Billy Graham. And I don't know how long it was before he left because I was working, but it was at least an hour Billy sat there. Kids climbing up on his lap, him praying for them, loving and serving people.

After he left, the buzz at my work for the next week was, "How awesome is Billy Graham?" The non-Christians I work with, some of whom were quite frankly opposed to the gospel, they loved Billy. They go, "He was so humble, he was so real, he was so nice. "It was so kind of him. He was accessible." And I thought, "Praise God for Billy Graham." Of all the Christians to drop into my workplace, we got this amazing man of God. And the way he conducted himself just put a sweetness into the workplace where people were absolutely blown away by the way he treated them, particularly the way he treated children.

And it reminds me of the story of Jesus today. See, Billy in that moment, he was showing us a little bit of Jesus.

JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

We're going to read a story, one of the most beloved stories in the whole Bible. It's in three of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus and it tells us about a day when Jesus had a moment like that. Big, famous, powerful man with enormous crowds has children who want to come and hang out with him and take a lot of his time and disrupt his day and interrupt his teaching. And there's his response and the response of his followers, some religious leaders. We'll read it for ourselves in Luke 18:15-17, "Now they were bringing even infants to him—" You see it, Jesus is like Santa Claus at the mall, a long line of kids coming to see him. "—that he might touch them. "And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. "But Jesus called them to him, saying, "'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, "' for to such belongs the kingdom of God. "'Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'" There's Jesus.

Now, this event happens in the middle of the Roman Empire, which is one of the most far-reaching, long-lasting empires in the history of the world. And the Roman Empire was not particularly fond to children. There was abortion, a primitive form, there was also abandonment. This was particularly true if a disabled or handicapped child was born, they would literally oftentimes be put out with the trash.

The same was true for daughters, daughters were not, as is sadly the case in some nations in our own day, as valued as sons. And so if a daughter was born, some families literally would just put the daughter out alive, a baby, on the trash heap to be picked up on collection day and thrown away. Now, I'm a dad, I've got three boys, two girls, I couldn't fathom life without my daughters. I couldn't fathom life without my two daughters. I had lunch with them today. I got lots of kisses and snuggles and visits and laughs with my girls every day. To think of just discarding them, that kind of abandonment was common in that day.

Then the result would be not only abortion and abandonment, but also abuse. Because these babies would be picked up and turned into slaves, gladiators, and prostitutes. And their lives would be wrecked and destroyed. And so Jesus here is working and speaking in the midst of a context that is not fond or friendly toward children oftentimes.

And we might look at that and say, "Well, that's a very primitive time and those are very primitive people," but we're not that dissimilar. This year, 1.5 million American children will be aborted. Their lives will be taken in utero. Additionally, there is abandonment, particularly by fathers, where the fathers abandon their responsibilities toward their children. Forty percent of kids tonight will go to bed without their father. They're thrown into poverty, they're left in a very dangerous situation, economically and socially and physically. In certain ethnic communities, that percentage is much higher, over fifty percent. So there is abandonment as well today.

And it does lead to abuse, child abuse of various sorts and kinds. Some people, and perhaps tragically some of you, harsh with children, mean with children, you don't just correct them but you punish them, which is sinful. As well, every ten seconds, a report is made for child abuse. Now imagine all

the cases that are not reported. So Jesus' Word and Jesus' example is fitting for his day but it fits our day, sadly, equally necessary.

BEFORE HE WAS GOD-BECOME-MAN, JESUS WAS GOD-BECOME-A-BABY.

So who is this man, Jesus, who's talking about children and interacting with children? Well, he's done one of the most extraordinary things in the history of the world and that is, bestowed particular dignity on children and childhood. Because Jesus Christ is God and we always say, become a man, which isn't wrong, but it's not altogether right. Before Jesus Christ was God-become-a-man, he was God-become-a-baby.

We tend not to think of Jesus in that light, do you? At Christmas, you're like, "Oh, yeah, he's cute. He went to the cross." We sort of miss everything in the middle. And the church creeds do as well. He was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate. Hey, what happened to elementary school? What happened to junior high? What happened to high school? The creeds all skip that time as well, because we struggle with Jesus being a child. But Jesus is God become a baby.

We read previously in the narrative of Luke's Gospel and Luke 2:52 that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God. He grew up, he was a baby and then he was a little boy and he had to learn how to walk and talk and read and write and feed himself. And he went through the equivalent of elementary school and junior high and he grew up and went through his teens and twenties. And at this point in the story, he's in his early thirties.

So Jesus bestows particular dignity on childhood because God went through childhood. Now God doesn't grow, God doesn't change, but Jesus, in becoming a man, he humbled himself, he set aside the continual use of some of his divine attributes to identify with us. So he remained God, but he chose to humbly live among us like one of us.

Now what this means about Jesus, and I see this as a dad, is that kids can relate to Jesus because he's been a kid. He had brothers and sisters. He had to obey his mother and his father. He had to do his homework. And so even children can relate to Jesus because at one point, he was their age. Isn't that fascinating?

This hadn't even really dawned on me till I started talking to the kids. They'd ask things like, "Hey, Dad, was Jesus a good brother?" Yeah. "Did he do his chores?" Yeah. Kids start relating to Jesus at their age because at some point, he was their age.

What's the story of Jesus? Well, he was born of a single mother, a virgin, but a single mother nonetheless we read earlier in Luke's Gospel. And so this is one of the reasons we encourage men at Mars Hill who are single and want to marry, don't overlook the single mothers. Jesus' mother was a single mother. And Jesus' father, who adopted him, who was not his biological, but his adopted father, was a blue-collar carpenter worker named Joseph. So Jesus was adopted. So as Christians, we're in this great legacy where Christians are involved in foster care and Christians are involved in adoption. Why? Well, our God was adopted.

A guy named Russell Moore, in a book, "*Adopted for Life*," hit some of these big ideas. So here's Jesus. He'd been a child. Now he's a grown man. He's eternally God entered into human history. His mom was a single mom, his daddy adopted him, and here he is male, not female, single, not married, childless, not a father. And who enjoys him? Who loves him? Who's drawn to him? Children. Isn't that amazing?

See, because in our day, who's the least likely person to be with children? Single men. Some guys would say, "Uh, I don't like kids. That's women's work, I'm a man." You can't get any more manly than Jesus, he's as masculine as can be. He likes kids, and kids like him. They're, in fact, drawn to him. You're going to see this at various points in the Gospel. They just come to him. At another point, they come to sing and dance and hang out with him.

Jesus attracts children in a way that religious people don't. We don't see this in the Gospels, "Oh, and the children all ran to the religious people." Never happens. The children all run to Jesus. They like him, he likes them. So men, this shows us it's a masculine, godly thing to love children, even if you're not a dad, and for children to enjoy being with you and you enjoy being with them. This is why we encourage men to aspire to be fathers and coaches and teachers and big brothers and nursery workers and to love and to serve children as Jesus did.

So the children are coming to Jesus and some of the accounts say that the kids were old enough to walk. So think little girls with pigtails and little boys with Fudgesicles and boogers. They're all coming to Jesus. "We're gonna go hang out with Jesus, he looks like fun." And there are also parents in this account who are sort of carrying their kids because they're too small.

And the disciples are freaking out, "Oh no, what about our service order?" "This is our big event. We have an order of things and the kids are disrupting everything. And, oh my goodness, they're wiping boogers on Jesus and somebody spilled their Fudgesicle on Jesus and the kid's yanking on his beard. Oh, this is very not okay because this is a solemn religious moment where Jesus is preaching a very important sermon."

And Jesus says, "Nope, I like kids. "Bring the kids to me. "In fact, let's stop everything we're doing, let's make them a priority." Isn't that wonderful?

GIDEON, ALEXIE, CALVIN, AND ZAC'S INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

So I read the commentaries on this and they brought out the obvious: That Jesus blessed them and welcomed them and he touched them and they all quoted Psalm 127 where it says that children are a blessing from the Lord.

And this is the big idea: children are a blessing from the Lord. We believe that. We really believe that at Mars Hill. And Jesus here demonstrates that he agrees with the Scripture that children are a blessing.

But beyond that, most of the Bible commentaries were boring because Bible commentaries are written by old, white nerds. I'm white and nerd and I'm getting old, and so I'm not saying it's all bad, but there are times in Bible commentaries where they miss it, like when there's kids or somebody's having fun or Jesus tells a joke. That tends to be where the old, white nerds don't land the dismount. They tend to miss what's going on.

So, in this story where all the kids are coming to Jesus and Jesus is glad to see them and they're glad to see him, and you know it's kind of a fiasco and mess. It's not super clean, right? Have you ever seen a bunch of kids just rush to someone? It's not really orderly. You don't have a bunch of kids in a single-file line. "Oh, and what would you inquire of the Lord today?" It's not gonna be like that. Fudgesicles, boogers, and ponytails, that's what we're dealing with.

So I went to the experts, I asked my kids. Alright, let's talk about this story. The old, white nerds missed the big idea. So I asked Gideon, my five-year-old son, Gideon Joseph; my seven-year-old daughter, Alexie Grace; my nine-year-old son, Calvin Martin; and my eleven-year-old son, Zachariah Blaise, some questions about Jesus and the children. I didn't ask Ashley because she's thirteen, so she would have been older than probably these kids were according to the Greek words that are used for children. And in that day she was actually old enough to be married, which freaks me out. So I'm not gonna talk about that because it freaks me out. But my four younger children, I asked these questions.

Alright. "Why do you think the kids were coming to Jesus?" I asked them the question. So Gideon, the great theologian that he is, said, "I think they liked him and they wanted to play with him because Jesus was fun." Let's unpack that.

Do you think Jesus was fun? There are things that we call the attributes of God. He's omniscient, he's omnipotent, he's omnipresent. He's also fun. I think Gideon nailed it. I was thinking about it. I don't remember ever reading a systematic theology—and I've got a handful, more than a handful, I've got a roomful of systematic theologies—and in the attributes of God, I've never remembered seeing "fun." But Gideon nailed it. Jesus is fun. He doesn't sin, but he's fun. That's why kids run to him. The only other time you see kids run to something is like an ice cream cart. Or like a Popsicle truck, they're running.

Why? Good times. Kids run where there's fun. Jesus was fun. This is why Jesus keeps getting invited to parties and why the religious people were very furrow-browed and critical. "Oh, he cannot be the Son of God. People enjoy him." Right? Jesus got invited to parties, Jesus gathered a crowd, Jesus welcomed children because Jesus was and is fun. Some of you don't know that. Some of you are not fun. Repent and be fun. Repent and be fun. It's actually really important for kids. I've had parents be like, "I can't get my children to obey." "Are you any fun?" "No." "Ha-ha, be fun." Children like fun. It's good to be fun. God is fun. One of his attributes that Gideon illustrates for us is Jesus was fun.

Alexie said, "I think they love God, thought he was fun." You'll notice a theme at the Driscoll household. Our God is a fun God. "And wanted to fun," oh there is it again, "with him and learn more about him." Alexie said, "I think Jesus was fun and so kids wanted to go have fun with him and then he'd teach 'em while he was having fun with 'em." Calvin said, "I think they wanted to meet him or be close to him or to learn more about him." And Zac said, "I think they loved him and he was nice to them, so they wanted to spend time with him." I think those are good insights.

I then asked them, "Why do you think the adults did not want the kids to come to Jesus?" Gideon said, "They thought the kids would be bothering Jesus because they thought Jesus was too busy for kids." See, sometimes we think that way, don't we? We have very important things to do. "You kids need to be quiet. you kids need to recognize "I'm very busy. I'm on the phone. "I'm surfing the Internet." "I'm watching television." "I'm balancing my checkbook." "You kids are disrupting this, get out of my way." "I have very important, serious adult things to do. Don't bother me, I'm busy." Jesus says, "What could be more important than inviting kids to be loved and disciplined and have some fun with them?" Very convicting.

SPENDING QUANTITY TIME WITH YOUR KIDS

I feel prompted to tell you this. You know, there's a good parenting lesson here. One of the lies that has been promulgated is that you don't need quantity time with your children, you need what? Quality time.

Here's the truth: You don't know when the quality time is going to come, when their heart's going to open up, when a situation arises, when they need you. You just don't know. So you can't say, "Well, on Tuesday from 3 to 4 p.m., we're going to have deep, heartfelt conversation." Alright, you don't know, so you need to be there a lot, need to be available and attentive. And then when their little heart opens up, love and serve, encourage, instruct, correct, whatever is needed at the moment.

I saw this last night at my house, the latest example. I brushed my teeth, came out. It was bedtime. There's Alexie, seven-years-old, super affectionate, love her. I did bike riding with the kids yesterday. She sat on my lap for like three hours, we watched a movie, snuggled, held hands, went for a walk with all the kids, but Alexie was particularly affectionate yesterday. So she was waiting for me because she only goes to bed via piggyback ride. It's the only way she will go to bed, via piggyback ride. It's not in the Bible, but it's a good idea, so I give her a piggyback ride every night.

So she's waiting for me and I said, "Okay honey, you ready for your piggyback ride?" And I could just tell in her little face, because she's usually very joyous and joyful, I could just tell something was perhaps bothering her. So I got down on one knee and I looked her in the eye while she was sitting in a chair, and I said, "Sweetie pie, "is there something wrong that Daddy can help you with? Is there something that Daddy needs to know about?" "No, I'm fine." I said, "Honey, it doesn't look like it." [Mimics crying.] Exploded. Just started bawling because she had recently gotten a Beanie Baby. The Beanie Baby was apparently very old. She realized that maybe the Beanie Baby was worth a lot of money. We watch shows like "Pickers" so all my kids are like, "Oh, we could find old junk and get rich." So now this is kind of their thing. And somebody tells her, "Oh, that Beanie Baby could be worth a lot of money." And she is thinking, "I have hit the Beanie Baby jackpot." But, oh no, because she wanted to play with the Beanie Baby, she

already took the tag off, which could diminish the value of said Beanie Baby.

So she has a seven-year-old economic crisis on her hands and she's really worried about it. And her little heart in the moment, it's kind of a big deal. I got down on one knee, I said, "Honey, it's okay. It's okay. Daddy makes money. We're not dependent upon the Beanie Babies for sustenance and life. If you enjoy the Beanie Baby, that's what the Beanie Baby was for. Only adults would buy and sell and trade Beanie Babies. They're made for children to have fun with." I literally wiped the tears from her eyes, kissed her, snuggled with her, prayed for her, gave her a piggyback ride to bed.

You don't know when the quality time is going to surface, so you have to be attentive and aware as much of the time as is possible.

Now, say, "Where do you get that?" Look at Jesus. This was not, "And now we're going to do the children's discipleship lesson." Jesus is teaching. There's a big crowd, there's a lot going on. There's nothing in the schedule for the kids. But the kids decide, "Let's go see Jesus." So Jesus is attentive, he's present, and he makes them a priority. He disrupts his plans. He allows them to, in the providence of God, interrupt his day, and he makes them a priority.

There's a great parenting lesson there. The children are a priority. They are a blessing. They are a gift. And that quality time comes sometimes when you don't expect it. And this was one of those quality time moments between the Lord Jesus and children.

IT WOULD BE AWESOME TO HAVE JESUS PRAY FOR YOU

Alexie said, in regards to why do you think the adults did not want the kids to come to Jesus, "They thought Jesus was too busy preaching and that kids cause a lot of trouble." Religious people cause way more trouble than children throughout the Bible. There is yet to be a church that is split down the middle or a denomination that had declared war because the children have caused it. Religious people are always the problem. It wasn't the children who betrayed Jesus and crucified him. Calvin said, "They thought it would distract him while he was preaching." And Zac said, "They did not think children were as important as adults." That is significant. Do you really think that children are as important as adults, equally image bearers of God, and deserving of time, energy, attention, and investment?

Then my last question was, "Why do you think Jesus was putting his hand on the kids?" Because the Bible says that he placed a hand on them. Gideon said, "Jesus loves kids and it would be awesome to have Jesus pray for you if you were a kid." Gideon was cracking up. He thought about it, kind of rolled an eye, and he looked up in the air when he said this. And he's like, "He prayed for them! That would be awesome!" He was really enthusiastic about that. It was pretty funny. We all cracked up. Yes, it would be awesome.

Alexie said, "He was probably blessing them and maybe he was praying for them," both of which are true, and I think that's exactly what was happening. Calvin, who's my most physically affectionate son, said, "Because he loved them and he wanted the kids to stay and spend time with him." See, Calvin, we call him Pastor Calvin because he's very emotionally intuitive and he's very physically affectionate. And so, for him, Jesus touching the children was an invitation to spend time with him. That's how Calvin saw him. And Zac says, "By embracing and loving them, Jesus showed them that he wanted them to stay and spend time with him."

There's the story of Jesus. Little children are attracted to him. He loves and enjoys them. He does so as a single man.

WORK IN THE NURSERY, SINGLE MEN

So let me say this: Single men, you should have a heart for children. If you do not, you need to pray and ask God to help you have a heart for children. And for those of you men who aspire to be fathers, welcome to Mars Hill. We love you. We're glad to have you. And one of our big values is to raise men who, like Jesus, love women honorably, and appreciate and serve children nobly. And we see that as a masculine thing for the finest of men.

I will give you a secret, single men. Many of you are single. I say this once or twice a year. Work in the nursery, work in the nursery, work in the nursery. Please do yourself a favor. Volunteer for the nursery immediately for two reasons. Number one, you can practice on other people's children before you have your own. That's hugely helpful. Okay? Number two, do you know—see, most of you single men have never worked in the nursery. You don't know this. You're not a father like me, who's been in there. Usually in the nursery are volunteering, lovely, sweet, young, single women who really aspire to motherhood, okay? Okay.

You single guys, you got to think about this, alright? If you're a single guy who wants to get married and become a father, you're working in the nursery with a lovely young woman. And the two of you are playing with children together. Alright, if you can't catch a fish, you have no bait on your hook. This is easy. You're playing with the child with a lovely young woman. "Oh, you like children? I like children. "You like Jesus? I like Jesus. "You would like to be pregnant? Hm-hmm!" [laughing] "Since we're here, we might as well mosey over to Premarital [Counseling]." Right? This is how it works. You're welcome.

HOW WE HELP CHILDREN MEET JESUS AT MARS HILL

Alright. So here's Jesus with the children. Now let me shift if I may. Oh, I see you didn't see it coming. The key is to sneak up on 'em. Let me shift to children at Mars Hill.

Jesus says, "Let's help children meet me," okay? So as Mars Hill Church, this is a ministry of ours, helping children meet Jesus. That's a big value to us. Let me tell you a little bit about kids at Mars Hill and something the Holy Spirit started convicting me of some months ago. On an average Sunday right now at Mars Hill, we have 1,600 children under the age of ten across all of our services and campuses. Technically, a megachurch is 2,000 people

or more. At the rate we're going, we will soon have a megachurch of elementary school kids.

Now, this is unusual because we tend to be in cities where there are not a lot of children. People are single, they don't get married, they don't want to have children, and as a result, there are not a lot of children. But we, Mars Hill, we read the Bible, it said, "Be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it," and we call dibs on that verse. We're like, "Done." That's what we're doing. So here's what we have at Mars Hill. Every year, hundreds of weddings, hundreds of weddings.

So it starts for us not just officiating weddings, but setting people up for a life together. Because getting married is easy and fifty years is hard. And so for us, we have Premarital [Counseling] and we want to help you marry the right person at the right way for the right time with the right motives for the right reasons. We want you to be part of this community so that you and your marriage and your children are in a context of extended support.

Because, here's what the Bible says, God is a Father. That's hugely important. Of all the words God could have chosen, that is an amazing choice. God is Father, Jesus is the Son of God and he is our big brother and he has come to live without sin, to die for our sin, to save us. Our big brother's our Savior. He rises from death so that we might be, and here's the language of the Bible, adopted, adopted into the family of God.

That's what it means to be a Christian. God is our Father and Jesus is our saving big brother.

And the Bible then goes on to say that the church is the household of God, or the family of God. So you know what? We have a budget and we do business and we own real estate just like families do. But at the end of the day, we're not a business, we're a big, extended family. That's who we are. And the Bible then uses this language that women who are Christians are like, what, sisters. And men who are Christians are like brothers. That's the language of the Bible.

Now I was talking to a scholar who's one of the leading New Testament cultural context scholars on the earth, taught for many years at Cambridge. I was doing a preaching tour in Australia and I sat down with him, and he said something to me that I'd never heard that I found fascinating. He said, in the early Roman Empire, in the days of the writing in the New Testament, it was actually illegal to call someone brother or sister who was not a biological relative, because tied to that were inheritance rights and land ownership. But we called one another brothers and sisters because when God is your Father, everything changes. And it doesn't mean you don't have a biological family, but you also have a spiritual family. And the church becomes a family for you. So she's like a sister and he's like a brother and Jesus is the big brother Savior and God is the Father.

We want you, if you're single, married, parent, whatever season of life, grandparent, to be in biblical community. We want to be that extended family. And a lot of this happens for us in Community Groups. So we would encourage you to be in community, particularly Community Groups with people of different life stages.

Now some of you are going to have a lot of questions about, "Well, what does this look like for me and marriage and kids?" So you don't want to assume anything. Let me take a few minutes and just explain children in the context of Mars Hill.

PARENTS ARE PRIMARY

Number one, as I told you, children are a blessing. We love kids. We see them as a blessing from God. And we see this for wives and mothers and for husbands and fathers. We also believe based on the teaching of the Bible that the person primarily responsible for the care and upbringing of the child is the father. Some of you say, "What about the mother?" She is incredibly important, usually it's mom who's raising the kids, feeding the kids, teaching the kids, and bringing 'em to church. But the Bible says that the father has to be involved. This is the teaching of the Old and New Testament, there are many places I could go. For those of you men who are interested in this, I've got a free book online called, "*Pastor Dad*." You can read it for yourself, it's short.

But I'll just give you one example, Ephesians 6:4 says that children should honor and obey their mother and father so their life would be long and that it would be successful, and that fathers are responsible before God to raise their children in the Lord without frustrating them. So we believe that mothers and fathers are responsible for the wellbeing of the child or children, but fathers are primarily responsible. So we hold the fathers here to a high, high regard.

And some have misunderstood this or maligned this and said, "Oh, so you don't honor women?" Yeah, we do. We don't want guys sleeping with their girlfriends, we want them marrying wives. We don't want guys walking out on their children, we want them to lovingly raise them. And we are tired of men abusing women and abandoning children. So we press men to be like Jesus, to treat women honorably and to love children nobly. And we believe that's a loving thing to do for women and children. And so for us, yes, yes, children are a blessing and yes, fathers are very important. This is why we would also encourage some of you men who are single to not just be looking for a good time, but a good legacy. Not just to be looking for the next weekend, but five generations into the future.

Furthermore, it means that some of you men should not overlook single mothers as Jesus' own mother was a single mother. And those children need a good daddy as well.

CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS ARE SECONDARY

And the way children are integrated into Mars Hill is, yes, parents are primary, and then we see other things as secondary. Schools are secondary, church is secondary. There is this tragic myth that got promulgated that institutions can do a better job raising children than parents. We don't believe that. It doesn't matter if you do private school, public school, home school, or Christian school, for example, with your children, you should make the

decision every child, every year, based upon circumstance. But no matter what, the parents have to be actively involved because you cannot replace the involvement and investment of the parents. You just can't. The parents are primary and they primarily responsible in the sight of God. But in addition to that, yes, school and church and other things, can be helpful and supplemental.

IT'S OKAY IF BABIES CRY IN THE SERVICE

Here's how it works at Mars Hill. We do have children's ministry on Sunday. Kids are welcome to go, those who are elementary school age. But they don't have to go. It's okay to have your kids in service. At about seven or eight years of age, my kids all decided just to transition into the service, they didn't want to go to kids' ministry any more. We don't have a hard and fast line. If you're a parent and you say, "I want my kids just to be in the service," great, we're glad to have them. And you may wonder, "Well, what if they make noise?" Well then praise be to God, it means they're alive. That's how we see it. "What if my baby cries?" Well, praise be to God. It means they're alive. "What if they're a little disruptive?" That's what children do. We would rather have a little commotion and a little disruption than a church that has no children.

I don't know if everybody agrees with me, [but] here's my view: a baby's crying, praise God, it means we got a baby. When kids are talking, praise God, it means we got kids. We don't want your kids to be disruptive, but you know what? Kids are gonna make noise. So if your kids are in the service, they cry, they make a little noise, that's fine. We usually, depending upon campus, we have a room for nursing mothers, they're welcome to go to if they feel more comfortable. But at the end of the day, this is not some Old Testament temple. "We meet in Old Testament temples with the holy of holies and the priest and you got to go through ritual purification and somebody's got to light the incense and it's all very serious."

We're a family. Church is like a big living room. God is our Father. And you know what happens at the house? The kids show up, they break things, they spill things, they make noise. Praise be to God. That's how it is in my house. That's how it is at this church. So yes, your kids are welcome in service. My only encouragement would be to not let the boys run around a bunch. The chairs have metal legs and boys always lead with their head. It's just a safety issue. Other than that, I don't care. I've had people come up and say, "That baby's crying." "Well, you're complaining, you're far more difficult to listen to than that baby." That's kind of my position.

AT WHAT AGE CAN A KID TAKE COMMUNION?

Additionally, people ask, "Well, what about Communion? When can kids take Communion?" When the parents believe they've met Jesus as God and Savior. So we let the parents decide that, and Communion's where we remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. And you know what? Parents, we're going to leave that up to you. We're not legalistic, we don't say, "Oh, at age ten," whatever. If your kid knows and loves Jesus and they want to take Communion, we don't restrict that. We say all Christians who repent of sin are welcome to take of Communion, even the little guys. That's why we even have juice and wine. They get bread and juice. It's okay. My kids started taking Communion pretty young.

WHAT ABOUT KIDS AND BAPTISM?

People ask, "What about baptism?" Now we don't baptize infants because we don't believe there's any biblical precedent for it. Jesus-loving and Bible-believing Christians would disagree with us, but that's our conviction. It's in "Vintage Church," if you want to check it out for yourself. But we will baptize children who are old enough to have a profession of faith. And we set this up with the parents. The parents, you're first pastors, you're raising your kids. And if they love Jesus and they want to get baptized, I don't want you to push your kids to make a profession, I don't want you to push them to Communion. I don't want you to push them to baptism, but if and when they're ready and their heart opens up to Jesus, we're glad to baptize them. It was really great seeing at Easter when, in the grace of God, we baptized 724 people, some of them were children. And mothers and fathers were assisting with a baptism. That's what we believe.

My youngest baptism in our family was Zac, I think he was about five. He was just going into kindergarten, I came downstairs one day and he had his "Jesus Storybook Bible" open. I don't think he could read yet, but he knew all the stories because we read 'em a billion times. And he's eating his cereal and he got really serious, he said, "John the Baptizer baptized Jesus and other people got baptized. I'm a Christian, I need to be baptized." I said, "Well, why do you need to get baptized?" He says, "Well, I know I'm a sinner and Jesus is God and he lived and he died and he buried and he rose and that's what baptism represents, that's what I believe." Wow, for five you landed the dismount, that was pretty good.

So I sat down and I had an honest conversation with him, "Do you feel like you should get baptized? "Do you feel like we're pushing you? Are you doing it because your daddy's a pastor?" "No, Dad, I love Jesus and I want to get baptized. "I feel like I'm supposed to. "It's right here in my kids' Bible. See Jesus getting baptized, he says to do it like that." Okay, because if you were forty, I'd say yes. Just because you're four, doesn't mean I should say no. I said, "Okay, here's what we do. We got to schedule an appointment at the church. You got to go meet with a leader, they're gonna ask you a bunch of theological questions. If you pass, then they'll dunk you."

So that's what we did. I brought him in, he carried his little "Jesus Storybook Bible," went into the meeting, I sat out in the hallway. I'm like, "You're on your own, big guy. Good luck." He nailed all the theological questions. He nailed them all. He's even Trinitarian. I mean, at five, right? He nailed them all. And he gave his own testimony and at that time it was a pastor interviewing who said, "He's a Christian. "If he was forty, we'd baptize him. He's five, I think we should." So I brought him up and handed him a mic, he gave his testimony, we baptized him. You know, that's what we believe, friends. Jesus says, "Hey, don't get in the way of kids coming to me." Right? We don't want to shove kids and have them fake faith, but we want to love kids, encourage kids, and see them come to Jesus.

KIDS IN COMMUNITY GROUPS

This includes Community Groups. Our Community Groups have children. We do do classes and we do do age-specific ministry, but we like to keep

families intact because today oftentimes they don't get a lot of time together. So there'll be Community Groups where there's families. If you're single, you can go to one. You could see married people and their children in their natural habitat, kind of like the zoo. You can observe them up close and learn and take notes. You can also help them by watching those kids and giving them a date night. And this allows parents to meet and families to meet and kids to meet and all of a sudden, this extended family of Mars Hill runs not so much on programming but more on friendship, love, relationship, and community. That's how we do things.

THE VISION FOR MARS HILL KIDS

And it got me thinking and praying some months ago, how could we do a better job welcoming children to Jesus? 'Cause he says that's part of our ministry. So some months ago, the Holy Spirit started stirring in my heart and soul and mind, what could we do to do a better job in children's ministry at Mars Hill? So let me cast a little vision for you that I'm really excited about. And it's something I've been thinking about and working on and delegating out and we've started mobilizing toward.

We're calling it Mars Hill Kids. It won't happen immediately, it's going to take some time. But what I want to do is I want to start preparing our children for ministry at age two. Here's how I see it: I want what happens in kids' ministry to be a mirror, an age-appropriate mirror, of what we do on Sunday, and what we do together as a church. And I reverse engineered it, and the way we're going, we're going to have thousands of kids, which means on Sundays, scattered across what shortly will be four states, God-willing, we would need 400 Sunday school teachers to give age-appropriate lectures to a few thousand children.

That's impossible to do with quality assurance across the board, but we are a video church, so I thought, "What if we built a Nickelodeon-type studio? What if we put together short, punchy, age-appropriate, Bible-based lessons about Jesus for kids with characters and fun and interaction? What if we recorded that and distributed it to all the campuses and made it available elsewhere as well for those who wanted to use it?" And so this is what we've been working on with Mars Hill Kids.

So it starts with the physical space and various campuses are going to get rebranded, painted, pick up, drop off, set up, better for families. Security cameras to ensure that everybody and everything's okay. We already have tight security and security guards making sure all the kids are fine. In this as well, I want, in every physical location that we own, an indoor play structure so that the kids can have some fun and especially the boys and the kinesthetic learners can get a little activity. It also then will be the kind of place during the day when the stay-at-home moms want to get together and have play dates and Bible studies and a place to collect and gather and their kids to make friends and to bring their non-Christian friends and their kids, it can be that free, cool, nice indoor spot for people and kids and parents to gather.

The way I want it to work is I want the kids to have worship time. We do that now, but I think we could do it better. And I want there to be an adult leader and I want there to be a child apprentice who is helping to lead worship because someday they're going to grow up and they're going to be our worship leader. I also want the video teaching to be world-class and excellent. And so we've hired a teacher to do that, I'll explain her to you in a moment.

Then I want age-appropriate craft or activity and I want kids' Community Groups. I want the little kids breaking into Community Groups to pray for one another and have a short, simple discussion. And if they can learn to pray for one another and answer basic questions and have a dialogue and explain what they're learning, it'll be an age-appropriate Community Group. And then there'll be an adult overseer, there'll be a child apprentice, the most natural leader in the group, which means at around age two or three, they're getting developed as Community Group leaders. If there's a kid in the class who's a good, natural leader with a big personality, they will apprentice to lead the Sunday event, they'll be practicing to become a campus pastor. I want two-year-olds getting ready to be campus pastors, Community Group leaders, and worship leaders.

The curriculum that this will be based on is based off the "*Doctrine*" book, which we use for church membership. Dr. Gerry Breshears and I wrote it. It takes the big thirteen themes of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation following the narrative storyline of Scripture. It's a pretty big, robust book. I think it's got like a thousand footnotes and literally gave me an intestinal ulcer writing, but it's done, praise be to God. And we use it for our membership.

So I thought, "What would it be like to hire somebody who's a curriculum developer to take the 'Doctrine' book and to make age-appropriate curriculum for video teaching, for a book, for home-based Bible studies for parents with children so that there's an integration between church and home based upon the 'Doctrine' book that's age appropriate so that when the kids grow up, they don't do like most kids and just leave after high school, but they realize, 'Well, I'm ready for the Doctrine class. I can become a member, I've been doing this curriculum since I was two.'" "Of course I'm gonna join a Community Group, I'd been in one since I'd been in a diaper." And, "I know how to sing songs and I'm okay with video because that's what I'd been doing for a really long time. I'm an old school, eighteen-year-old veteran, that's what I am."

I started thinking about it, the curriculum needs to be two-year cycles because the learning styles of children and their needs rotate about every two years. So think, two- and three-year-olds, four- and five-year-olds, six- and seven-year-olds, whatever the case may be. So I started thinking and praying and envisioning all of this for Mars Hill Kids and rebranding the space and reinventing what we do for children together.

We sent out a national search for a world-class teacher to write the curriculum, to publish the book. And also out of this too, ultimately I'd like to see a kids' Bible with Mars Hill illustrators, kind of cool, dark, a lot of the bloody Old Testament stories so the boys will like it too. We're gonna do it Mars Hill style.

And so in the grace of God, come to find we had this teacher and curriculum writer right in our midst: a gal at the West Seattle campus. Her name's Chrissie, you could pray for her, she was recently married. She's now working on the curriculum around which the Mars Hill Kids experience will be

built. She's got her BA from Stanford, she's got her master's from Pace University. She's won the Sue Lehmann Excellence in Teaching Award, a national prize for outstanding leadership towards student achievement from over 4,000 teachers. She also won the NBC Education Champion Award, a national teaching honor awarded to the fifty most effective educators in America. She loves Jesus, she's a member of our church, the Seattle Times and KING 5 have done feature stories on her because she is a world-class teacher, has helped set up charter schools and curriculum for poor kids in rough neighborhoods. And she feels called to do this for us. So we've officially hired her.

All of this is underway. It's going to take a while to roll it all out. But think, age-appropriate Doctrine curriculum with a book for parents to help do devotions with their kids at home, age appropriate so that they'll learn the doctrines at an age-appropriate level, graduating toward memory verses and reading in the Bible and homework assignments. Think really cool, Nickelodeon-style videos shot, age appropriate. Fun worship experience, play structure, an activity for the kinesthetic learners, and also a Community Group time where kids are learning to share their faith and pray for one another. Okay, that's kind of my big vision I feel like the Holy Spirit's given me for kids.

So I just encourage you right now, be praying for that. I hope you're encouraged by it. I don't think we've done a bad job, but I think we could do far, far better and change is afoot. And some of you have classic skills and abilities to help: kids@marshallchurch.org. Okay, kids@marshallchurch.org if you would like to nominate yourself to help out.

WHAT WE SHOULD LEARN FROM KIDS

So two big ideas. Number one, we need to teach children, not that we need to teach children, we get to teach children. And what a blessing and an honor and a joy that is. Number two, Jesus says we also should learn from children. Not that they're sinless and perfect, but Jesus says we can learn from them. He says, "For to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." So in closing, let me tell you some things we can learn from children about entering the kingdom of God like a child.

Children are born of a father in the same way that Christians are born again of God the Father. The Bible uses that language, that we're born of a father but we're born again of God the Father, spiritually reborn. And children take their father at his word. How many of you daddies are shocked to have learned this? You say something, you think it's funny or cute, your kids totally believe you. Right? I mean, I was—I remember having a conversation with a little boy one time, he's like, "We have a dragon." I was like, "Really? Have you ever seen it?" "No, but my dad said we have a dragon." The dad's like, "I was kidding, they don't understand that." Right? They're literalists. They take you at your word. They're wondering where their unicorn or their dragon or their leprechaun is. And so kids tend to come with just an implicit faith in the words of their father. "If Dad says it, it's true."

In that same way, dads, we need to always tell the truth to our kids. This doesn't mean we can't use our imagination, but we need to be truthful. God's a Father and these are his words and, like children who trust the words of their father, we need to take Dad at his Word. So when we read, "What? They walked on water?" "They did. Dad said they did." "He rose from death?" "Yes he did. Dad tells the truth."

Additionally, children utterly depend upon their father for provision and protection. My children do not make any money. My seven-year-old daughter cannot defend herself. Children require a father's provision and protection. Our Father, God is our Father, he provides, everything we have is a gift from him, James says, and he protects us, looks over us. He takes good care of us. So we're supposed to start to see the kingdom of God like a family governed by a Father who is a King and a warrior filled with love and grace.

Also, children confidently approach their father for anything. Isn't that true? My kids will walk up to me, "I need a bike. I want a glass of water. We need to wrestle. I need you to pray for me." They just walk right up and tell me whatever, whenever. As Christians, we call that prayer. Prayer is where the children of God just go to their Dad and talk to him about whatever they need to talk him about.

Also, children receive instruction and correction from their dad. Dad teaches you things and corrects you. God's our Father, he instructs us and he corrects us.

Additionally, children live in the father's kingdom, whether that's a condo, a dorm, a home, an apartment. God is a Father, he's preparing a place for us, the kingdom of God is our home and we will live in the place that the Father provides.

Additionally, children carry their father's name. So the kids, in my house, I love 'em, enjoy 'em, appreciate 'em, they're the Driscoll kids. We carry the family name Christian. It's a family name. We're part of a big family with a great Father. Children are objects of the father's love. They're objects of the father's love and we, as the children of God, are objects of the Father's love.

You have a Father who loves you, who loves you. That changes everything. If you turn from sin, trust in his Son, you enjoy the benefits of being adopted into his family.

CHILDREN ARE A GLORIOUS INCONVENIENCE

And lastly, children are a glorious inconvenience. Are children an inconvenience? Absolutely. It's why many people don't want to have children. "Oh, they're such an inconvenience." Having a child is a big deal, infertility can be a real pressing issue. You finally get pregnant, maybe you have a miscarriage, maybe you don't, you don't have the miscarriage, then you have all the water retention and the weight gain and the heartburn and the kicking of the bladder. I mean, I've seen it firsthand, it's exciting. It's an inconvenience. And then the baby's born. Having a baby is an inconvenience. I've watched it, I know why we give women drugs. It's necessary. And then the child is born and the children, they sleep during the day, they're up all night, they cost tons of money, they scream and fluids come from every hole like a sprinkler, right? They're an inconvenience. And then we get to junior high, oh. And then it's an—and then they want to go to college, then they want to get married and it costs money and they take time and they're an

inconvenience.

And you know what? They're a glorious inconvenience. They're a glorious inconvenience.

GOD SEES AND LOVES US AS HIS CHILDREN

And here's the big idea: we tend to not see ourselves as children. We tend to see ourselves like the disciples, "Well, we're very responsible adults with very important things to do." And God says, "You know what I see? Ponytails, boogers, and Fudgesicles, that's what I see." You're not totally able to take care of yourself. You need your dad. You were an inconvenience. I don't know about you, Father, I apologize for being such an enormous inconvenience. But you know what? The fact that the Father loves me and he endures with me and he protects me and he provides for me and he instructs me and he corrects me, it reveals that he's glorious. He's amazing. And we, by the grace of God, get to be the children of God. We get to be that inconvenience through which he is revealed to be glorious. That's what Christianity's all about.

So if you're here and you're not a Christian, I would invite you through Jesus Christ to enjoy God as your Father and we as your family. Isn't this good news?

And I want you just for a moment to consider with me, that if we had the heart of Jesus for children and we raise children who we love and instructed in the Lord and they grew up to love and serve Jesus, let's say at Mars Hill, we have a few thousand children and they all have children, who all have children, who all have children, who love and serve Jesus. We're leaving a legacy of gospel faith that goes on maybe until Jesus comes back.

There's a story at the end of Genesis where a little family of sixty-some people goes into Egypt, and they're the children of God. They have children who have children who have children. Four hundred and forty years later, they emerge as the nation of Israel, a few million people. They went from a few dozen to a few million.

We may be in the midst of that. And it starts with the heart of Jesus. We need to approach our Father and his kingdom like kids and we need to raise our kids to love their heavenly Father.

Father, thank you for this wonderful opportunity that you bestowed us a people. God, this is a big vision, a big hope, a big dream, a big possibility. God, I pray for those who are struggling with infertility that even if they don't have children, they would have Jesus' heart for children and as parents, one day, or teachers or nursery workers or big brothers and sisters, that they would love and serve children.

God, I thank you as well for all the kids you've given us, all the kids you've given us. One thousand six hundred, every Sunday, little blessings, and more in the belly and more to come. Father, thank you that as we examine children, we learn how you are a good Father and we're kids that are an inconvenience. And you're glorious. And I pray, God, that the parents in general, that the fathers in particular, that we would take it as a noble, masculine honor to love and serve children and to welcome them to Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.