

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Why a Family-Integrated Church?*"

As I shared last week, some time back the elders and I talked about having a sermon explaining why we generally do things as families. I wanted to do that before getting back into Luke to prevent another interruption.

Last week was part one on having children in worship. This morning is part two and we'll be back in Luke next week.

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Last week we looked at numerous Old Testament verses. This morning we will look at the New Testament verses...and this brings us to listen one...

Lesson one: having children around is also the New Testament pattern.

I would like to show you some verses in the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles.

Let's start with **Matthew 21:12**. This is the account of Jesus cleansing the temple.

Matthew 21:12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." 14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, AND THE CHILDREN CRYING OUT IN THE TEMPLE, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, 16a and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"

Pause here. The religious leaders were upset about two things...

First, what Jesus was doing: healing **the blind and the lame**.

Second, the children in the temple. They didn't want them making noise and crying out praises to the Lord.

But look at Jesus's response...

Matthew 22:16b And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?"

Jesus wanted the children there, and He defended their presence and praise.

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Next turn to the right to **Mark 9:35**.

Mark 9:35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And HE TOOK A CHILD AND PUT HIM IN THE MIDST OF THEM, and taking him in his arms...

I want you to notice not what Jesus said, but what He did. He was in the middle of teaching, and He reached down and grabbed a child. He didn't have to tell one of the disciples to go get a child from somewhere to serve as an object lesson.

The point is, He had children around when He was teaching.

When I preached at David Eddy's church a few months ago the worship leader had a small child in one arm the whole time. When I went up to preach, I applauded him, and everyone cheered.

I'm not saying DJ, Kevin, or Jamison need to lead music with a child in their arms, but occasionally it might be nice. They might object because they are playing guitar, but they could put a child on their shoulders.

Look one chapter to the right at **Mark 10:13**.

Mark 10:13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to SUCH BELONGS THE KINGDOM OF GOD. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” 16 And HE TOOK THEM IN HIS ARMS AND BLESSED THEM, laying his hands on them.

Two points about this account...

First, we see another instance of Jesus rebuking people who tried to keep children away.

Second, He argued that children are central to the kingdom of God. That's a strong statement that I think argues for children to be present during worship. If the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like children, then we should probably have children worshiping with us.

Turn to **Acts 20**. Here's the context for this account...

Paul was teaching late into the night and look at **verse 9** to see what happened...

Acts 20:9 And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. 10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” 11 And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. 12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

The Greek word for **youth** is *pais* (pronounced pice) and it means child or infant. It is the same word used in **Matthew 2:16** to describe the infants Herod murdered and **Matthew 21** to describe the children in the temple who were calling out.

The point is the young child was there while Paul was preaching.

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Look one chapter to the right at **Acts 21**. Here's the context...

Paul is at Tyre and he's about to head to Jerusalem. Look at **verse 5**...

Acts 21:5 When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, WITH WIVES AND CHILDREN, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed 6 and said farewell to one another...

Everyone, including the children, escorted Paul outside the city to say goodbye to him.

Now I know what you're saying...

"This is only people saying goodbye to Paul. It is not a very strong argument for family integration."

I agree with you, but these are the only two examples in Acts that mention children.

Why is that?

Because everywhere else in Acts it discusses households worshipping together and the children were part of those households. Let me read a few of the verses:

- **Acts 10:2** [the Roman centurion was] a devout man who feared God WITH ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD...and prayed continually to God.
- **Acts 16:15** [Lydia] was baptized, AND HER HOUSEHOLD as well.
- **Acts 16:34** [the Philippian jailer]...rejoiced ALONG WITH HIS ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD that he had believed in God.
- **Acts 18:8** Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together WITH HIS ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD.

The point is families were praying and worshipping together.

Last week when we looked at the verses in the Old Testament, I said that there were no examples of children being separated from their parents for worship and it's the same in in the New Testament.

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Go ahead and turn to **Titus 2**. Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus.

Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

This is not a trick question. Who is the **you** Paul is addressing in the verse...and don't say me or us?

It's Titus. Paul wrote this letter to a pastor named Titus.

Look at **verse 2**...

Titus 2:2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

Notice Paul didn't address **older men** like he addressed Titus, because the letter wasn't written to older men. Paul was telling Titus what older men should be so he could shepherd them well.

In the next verse he says what older women should be...

Titus 2:3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

In **verse 6** he says what younger men should be...

Titus 2:6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

In **verse 9** he says what bondservants should be, because slaves, or bondservants, were so common in the Roman empire...

Titus 2:9 Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative

Paul didn't address any of these people directly because the letter was not written to them.

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Now keep this in mind and turn to the left to **Ephesians 5**.

Unlike the books of Timothy and Titus, which were pastoral epistles written to individuals, Ephesians, like Paul's other epistles, were written to churches. The pastors and elders would receive Paul's letter and read it aloud to the church.

Look at **Ephesians 5:22**...

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Notice the significant difference: instead of talking about what wives should do, like Paul did with Titus, he addressed women directly.

Why is that?

He knew this letter would be read to the church, wives would be present, so he wanted to address them directly.

Look at **verse 25**...

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Again, Paul knew husbands would be present, so he addressed them directly.

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Now look at **Ephesians 6:1**...

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Paul didn't have to address children directly. He could have said, *“Fathers and mothers, tell your children to obey you, for this is right, and don't you want your children to live for a long time.”*

But he addressed children as directly as he addressed husbands and wives, because he envisioned them being part of the church services when these letters were read.

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And something else worth noticing...

Paul had pretty high expectations for children: he thought they could pay attention, notice when they're addressed, learn, be convicted, and obey.

So, if someone ever asked why there are no verses in the epistles commanding churches to have children present, it is because it was assumed they were there.

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Now let me ask a question...

Over last week's sermon and this morning's sermon we've seen that the biblical pattern is families being together. So why wouldn't all churches take this approach?

The answer brings us to lesson two...

Lesson two: A family integrated church (part one) is harder for parents.

We live in a consumer driven society that has, sadly, greatly affected the church. Most seeker sensitive churches are born out of this mentality. They ask themselves...

“What will be the most attractive? What will bring in the most people? What will be easiest for people, so they want to return?”

And I know a family integrated approach requires more work. It is harder to watch your kids, get them to sit still, and try to get them to pay attention to the sermon...versus dropping them off with other people to watch them.

I know the family integrated approach is not as attractive, and I know this because there are few large family-integrated churches. Many of the family-integrated pastors I know are bi-vocational, because their churches aren't large enough to support them.

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Let me be honest with you about something...

I want a healthy, growing church. I want my church to grow as much as the next pastor.

So why would I lead my church to do something that I know can be unattractive and probably produce a smaller church? Why not do whatever I think will be the most attractive and provide the biggest church?

I will give you three reasons...

The first reason is probably obvious from last week's sermon and this morning's sermon: I think this is the more biblical approach to church.

Last week I said it's not a hill to die on – it's a nonessential versus an essential – but I'm still convinced it fits the pattern in Scripture.

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The second reason is...

I want my children around. I like to be with them. I like to see them. And if there's one place, second only to my home, that I want my children with me, it is at church and church activities.

I have had more people than I can count tell me how fast the time goes with your children and I agree. The saying is: the days are slow, but the years are fast...and it is true.

I can't believe Rhea will be sixteen in a few months. That means she could be married in...seventeen or eighteen years. That's shocking to me!

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The third reason is found in this verse...

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for THEY ARE KEEPING WATCH OVER YOUR SOULS, AS THOSE WHO WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT.

The elders and I must **give [God] an account** of our leadership of this church. That is sobering!

We can't run a popularity contest:

- We can't ask, "*What will allow us to have the biggest church?*"
- Instead, we must ask, "*What is best spiritually for the congregation?*"

And I'm convinced a family integrated approach is best spiritually.

Let me share a few of the reasons I feel this way...and this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

Lesson two: A family integrated church (part two) encourages fathers to be spiritual leaders.

Most of you probably know I was raised Catholic. I was saved in Calvary Chapel, and I'm thankful for what I learned there, but you might remember in last week's sermon I shared that whatever we first experience we tend to think is best. Because Calvary Chapel was my introduction to Christianity, I thought that whatever they did was right and if any churches did anything differently than they were wrong.

Then I went into ministry at Grace Baptist as a youth pastor. That's when I learned that there are other solid churches out there besides Calvary Chapels.

Both churches – Grace Baptist and Calvary Chapel – were very segregated. That's all I knew, so that's what I thought was best.

When I was hired as the youth pastor at Grace Baptist, it seemed like, "*We have a youth pastor. Now we have someone to raise our kids.*"

I remember one time a teenager in the church was struggling and I was sent to help him. I don't remember if I was even a father yet, say nothing about having any experience with teenagers, so I don't think I had any business being the one called on.

But this is the typical approach...

A youth pastor is going to be young, fun, and cool – and young was the only one of these three things I had going for me – versus old, wise, and experienced.

Then I started learning more about men being spiritual leaders in their homes, and it created a collision between:

- My conviction about men shepherding their families
- And me being a youth pastor who was shepherding other people's children. It seemed like my position was allowing men to abdicate their roles by partially fulfilling that role for them.

I have become even more convinced since then that if we want:

- Spiritually strong families

- Children who are growing up in the fear and admonition of the Lord
- Men who are spiritual leaders in the home

We should pursue a family-integrated model.

Let me provide three encouragements...

First, the church looks like our homes, and our homes look like the church.

Hopefully you're worshipping together as a family during the week. We provide the family worship guide each week to help support this happening.

If we're worshipping as families during the week there's a compatibility or parallelism with corporate worship on the Lord's Day and.

There are some differences, but we're doing many of the same things:

- Praying
- Reading God's Word
- Possibly singing

Our children are prepared to do this on Sunday, because they've been doing this during the week.

Now let's say your children don't sit perfectly in church...which makes them like every other child in history who has sat in church. This brings me to my second encouragement...

Tell your children that if they have trouble sitting in church on Sunday then they get to practice during the week. You can put a sermon on for them and they practice sitting and listening. You can even bring them to church and have them practice sitting in the pew. This is what we have done as a family.

Tell them the first time they get to practice for twenty or thirty minutes and if it happens again they get to practice for forty-five or sixty minutes.

Third, over the last six or seven years I've probably put on about six marriage conferences per year. If I'm invited to speak at another event, such as a homeschool conference, I still try to have a message or two about marriage.

Ladies, no offense, but one thing I've learned is most women are completely oblivious to two things:

1. First, how nervous their husband might be to pray and read the Word with his family.
2. Second, how encouraging or discouraging she can be toward her husband.

So, ladies, I don't want to spend too much time on this, but when your husband leads your family in worship, try to be an encouragement to him and make considerably more deposits than withdrawals.

Next part of the lesson...

Lesson two: A family integrated church (part three) surrounds children with wisdom versus foolishness.

Let me share another testimony...

If you're going to be a youth pastor, you're going to plan youth events. Every summer I would take the youth to camps, but quickly became disillusioned with them:

- Because of the teaching
- Because of the way the girls dressed
- Because of the way the boys acted toward girls

I started doing my own camps with my youth, and I had to have chaperons. Every youth had the same fear: *"Are you going to ask my parents to chaperone?"*

The last thing any youth want is to have their parents around when they are trying to have fun. Youth would ask me, *"My parents chaperoned last time, so can you be sure not to ask them this time? Isn't it some other youth's turn to have to have their parents go?"*

Now fast-forward to me coming to Woodland Christian Church and we go to camp as families. I'm listening to young people and their concern is, *"I hope my dad doesn't have to work so he can come to camp with us."*

Which one of these environments do I want to foster?

- One where children don't want their parents around?
- One where children are sad when their parents are NOT around?

And I could go a little further and say that in family integrated churches not only do young people want their parents around, they are generally better around people of all ages ...

In family-integrated churches, young people learn to be more comfortable around adults and infants:

- I like my children being around adults.
- I like my children being around younger people.
- I like my children being around infants.

I love to see the children in the church helping with other children whether they are holding their younger brother or sister, or whether they are helping another family

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When young people are around older, more mature people, it raises the young people's level of maturity.

Listen to this...

Psalm 144:12 May our sons IN THEIR YOUTH BE LIKE PLANTS FULL GROWN, our daughters like CORNER PILLARS CUT FOR THE STRUCTURE OF A PALACE.

The psalmist wanted the youth to be like plants that are full grown – which is to say mature and strong – even when they’re young. He says the same thing about daughters, that they would be like strong pillars to fortify the palace.

We all want our children to be mature, even when they’re young, and I believe there is greater potential for that when our children are around adults.

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Another verse...

Proverbs 13:20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

When children are around wise people, they will grow in wisdom.

But if they are regularly put in groups of children their own age, they will stay at the level of foolishness.

Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

When you have lots of children together you have lots of foolishness.

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A few years ago Andrew Criss shared a testimony with me, and I’ve asked him to share it again this morning.

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Last part of lesson two...

Lesson two: a family integrated church (part four) gives the family-less a family.

I don’t know if family-less is a word, but I wanted to use it.

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In October Katie and I went to Nebraska to speak at a homeschool conference on Friday and Saturday, and I was invited to guest preach at a local church on Sunday.

I would guess the average age of the church was probably sixty. There were only two young families. One of the young families was the family that invited me to preach, so we spent quite a bit of time with them.

Katie and I felt bad for this family’s kids because we didn’t think they had many friends in the church. Katie asked them how they felt about attending this church and they shocked us by saying...

“We love it. We feel like we get to have all these grandparents.”

We thought their answer was great.

I wanted to pastor a church, and I wanted that church to be a family. I wanted families to come in and become part of a larger family. So, everyone who joins the church gets more brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and children.

We have nine kids with a tenth on the way. We already have a big family. I never sit back saying, “*I’m lonely.*”

I’m trying to find ways to keep up with the kids I have and spend time with other people.

But single people could be lonely, and the church can provide the relationships they need.ⁱ

I mention this, because there’s kind of this idea that family integrated churches are for families, but they don’t work for single people...basically, family-integrated churches are not good for people without families.

This is actually THE OPPOSITE of the truth,

Picture someone coming to church alone. This person needs the church more than families do:

- A family that comes to church together has each other
- But single people don’t have anyone. They need the church to be their family that gives them relationships.

If you’re here without a spouse or without children, I want to encourage you to

- View the church as your family...
 - View the church as the place God has filled with brothers and sisters for you.
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Let me provide some biblical support for this...

Luke 8:19 [Jesus’] mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. 20 [Jesus was told], “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.” 21 But He answered, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

Jesus recognized His spiritual relationships as His truest family members!

Let me close with this beautiful truth about family...

If you have repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ, then you are adopted into the family of God:

- Jesus is your brother: **Hebrews 2:11 He is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sister.**
- God the Father has become your Father.

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

ⁱ Let me share something I noticed during COVID. Please be gracious if what I describe is not true of your situation. I'm simply sharing what I noticed to generally be true.

During COVID I heard about many people who were hurting because of the lack of relationship with others. I didn't feel that way. I talked to a few other people who also didn't feel this way. Any guesses what we all have in common?

Lots of kids.

But who could understandably say this?

Single people or people without children.