

Toward a Youth Ministry Philosophy #2

Youth Ministry

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, June 10, 2018

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, we are certainly glad to be able to come back to God's word again this morning, glad that you're all here with us both friends new and friends old, and those friends in between. At our church, our ministry is grounded upon the verse by verse teaching of God's word. I like to emphasize that. We believe that that is the most important act of worship that we can do, especially over the course of time, is to come to God's word and to give ear to it, to let God speak, as it were, through what his word says, through what his word teaches and to come with a reverent heart, a submissive heart, a believing heart that upholds the authority of the word that hears what it has to say. To respond in faith and obedience to the teaching of God's word is the highest act of worship that there can be and we believe it's a mistake to say that music is worship and then you preach, the whole collective of what we do here is offered up as a service of worship to the Lord who has made himself known in Scripture and in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result of that, we believe that we have a great stewardship of responsibility, kind of a twofold stewardship of responsibility that we want to recognize here this morning. First of all, there is a stewardship of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the stewardship of the message that is revealed in Scripture and has been handed down to us through generations by faithful people, that has been communicated to us somewhere in our own personal individual pasts, that somebody came to us with an open Bible, somebody came to us and somehow one way or another communicated truth to us, communicated to us an explanation of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

And he goes on and gives the content of that Gospel. He says,

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

That is the only Gospel that there is. That is the message that delivers men from sin and judgment and brings them into reconciliation with a holy God. It is our privilege to

believe that Gospel, to believe in Christ, and now to be ambassadors of Christ proclaiming the same message that saved us. You know, what saved you from your sin, what caused you to be born again was not some kind of social message of racial reconciliation, what saved you was a message of reconciliation to God, with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ as you repented of your own individual sins and turned to Christ for redemption from sins that you yourself had committed, not necessarily some prior generation that you yourself did not participate in. There are reasons for me to just allude to that briefly here this morning. But we have this treasure, we have this stewardship, we have this pearl of great price to which we want to be faithful in our proclamation of it.

Now we also have another stewardship that falls under the umbrella of that that we spoke about last time. We have collectively a stewardship over the young lives that are represented in our church body. We are blessed with a number of young families with young children who are seeking to raise their children up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord and we recognize that these children themselves, these young people, are a gift from God, a gift from God to the families and it is our privilege as a church to minister the word to them over the course of time, those that are a part of our fellowship. And what we did last time which is not our normal pattern because we weren't going so much verse by verse but dealing with a topical message of great importance to our church life over time, is that we wanted to start to explain, we wanted to start to build a biblical basis for the philosophy of youth ministry that we carry in our church, and this is important not only for families with children but it's important for everyone in the church so that we're all going in the same direction on these matters. We have within our church body 80 young people under the age of 18 that are somehow a part of our body that are connected with families in our body that are a regular part of what we do. That to me and that to our elders is a matter of great consequence and something that we need to take seriously to know how we want to conduct ourselves as a church in regard to that. Now as we said last time, we made a pretty important, we made a pretty significant statement to this regard: it is very crucial to understand at the outset that the Bible commits the spiritual instruction of children to their parents. Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, raise your children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord." The discipline of children is given to their families, given to their parents more specifically, not to the church. So we recognize the preeminent place that God has given to parents in the spiritual nurture of their children. It is the parents who are with their children throughout the week day by day, not simply for an hour or two on a Sunday morning, and so it is the parents that have the prerogative, that have the responsibility, that have the opportunity, that have the privilege of being the ones who are primarily responsible for the spiritual shaping of those young people that are given to their families, and recognizing that distinction and that priority is of great importance.

As I mentioned last time, we have some albums out on the table, the circular table in the lobby, where we have explained this in greater detail, an album called "The Parenting Call," that speaks to the responsibilities of parents and speaks to the biblical role of parents in the nurture of their children. If you are not familiar with those messages, we would encourage you to take one. The albums are free and these messages last week and

this week and also on Tuesday of this week, all presuppose that. We're talking about something a little bit different but I wanted to make that available to you as kind of a foundation for what we're talking about here today.

Now, that brings us to the question: what then do we think about the church and what is our philosophy of youth ministry here at Truth Community Church? And it doesn't take much to be around our church if you're familiar with the way other churches operate to realize that we do it a little bit differently and that's not by accident, that's by a conscious philosophy that the elders felt like it was important for us to address publicly on a Sunday. What do we think about children and youth ministry? Well, what we saw last time was is that we felt like it was important to start with Scripture, to start with the Bible to see how children are described in connection with the people of God from Scripture and let that be our starting point rather than what is so commonly done, to look and see what other big churches are doing and say we want to be like them, and to simply emulate what's always been done or what's commonly done. Let's set that aside for a moment and just look at what the Bible says about children among the people of God and let that be what gives us our cues for the direction that we want to take. You see, when you believe in the preeminent authority of Scripture, that has consequences for the way that you do ministry. You cannot on the one hand say, "I believe in the authority of the Bible," and then go and say, "but I want to conduct and construct ministry the way that I think is best without regard to what Scripture says." We need to let Scripture inform to the best of our ability everything that we do and the way that we approach that. That's what we try to do. We realize that we do it imperfectly, we realize that we do it inadequately but we want to come to the Bible first and see what the Bible has to say.

Now, last time for those of you that weren't with us and even if you were with us it's still what we did last time, last time we started this and we simply looked at the place of children in the Old Testament and I'm not going to review that. We looked at six, eight, 10 passages, I didn't count them, but numerous places throughout the life of the nation of Israel over the course of centuries where children are placed within the broader body of worshiping adults. You see the children alongside the adults in the worship of God. You see the commands and the festivals being structured with the intention of instructing the children and to pass along truth to the children through what is being done. In a few weeks on a Tuesday, we will look at the second longest Psalm, Psalm 78 in the entire Psalter and we will see that the second longest Psalm in the Bible is a long discourse on the history of Israel designed to instruct their children in their national history and to instruct them on the lessons that they are to take from that. Beloved, as a church, we look at those things and we think that those things have weight, to see the children described as being among the worshiping adults is something that we think carries weight and that's what we looked at last time. There are copies of that message available on the round table out in the lobby also.

Well, that's the Old Testament, that's the nation of Israel. We see a distinction between the church and Israel and so it's a fair question to say, "Well, what about the New Testament, then?" Well, when you look at the New Testament, what you find is that the pattern continues. I briefly alluded to this last time. The pattern continues in the New

Testament. Last time we saw children in the Old Testament, let's look for a moment at children with Jesus. Children with Jesus and if you will turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Mark 10, what you find is that children were present with Jesus when he was teaching the adults.

Mark 10:1 says,

1 Getting up, [Jesus] went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.

And what happened while this crowd was gathered around him? In verse 10, you see

10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

You see him teaching in crowds, you see him teaching in homes, and in that context in verse 13 it says,

13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Beloved, I think that is significant. That text shows the disposition of our Lord himself during the course of his teaching ministry during the course of his public ministry. His disciples viewed them as a distraction to be eliminated, to be taken away apparently so the important stuff could be done. Jesus by contrast, rebuked his disciples not the children, and he made it plain and he welcomed them. He held them and welcomed them into his arms. He blessed them. There could not be a greater contrast between the attitude of our Lord and the disciples who treated them as an unwelcome distraction. I ask you, beloved, or I'll state it to you this way: I personally want to be on Jesus' side, don't you? I want to emulate to the extent that that is possible, I want to emulate the attitude of Christ that welcomed children into the presence of those who were hearing his instruction.

In a similar way, the Gospel writer Luke records the same attitude of Christ in Luke 18. Turn to Luke 18 with me. Luke 18:15,

15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. 16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and

do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Now going a little bit further, there is, as you know, there is a certain lack of pretension in children, there is a transparency to them, there is just a forwardness to them, and Jesus uses that trait that characterizes children to say that that is the mark of the faith of anyone who wants to enter the kingdom of God.

Look at Matthew 18, beginning in verse 1. Matthew 18:1,

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Apparently our response to children is a matter of consequence to our Lord.

What we see here in these passages is not a detailed instruction for a philosophy of youth ministry in a local church, I realize that, but what I want you to see is that when our Lord was here, children were present during the course of his public teaching and his ministry. They had a role to play. They had a duty to fulfill. They were the welcome objects of our Lord's affection, so much so that he defended them against the adult disciples who viewed them as an interference with the ministry that was taking place.

Now, I think we let that set in and let that filter through our thinking. We let that shape the way that we think about children in the context of the gathering of the people of God. Jesus told his disciples that even they had something to learn from the children that were in their midst and so what you see is as you go through these passages that we looked at last week in the Old Testament, children present with the people of God. The people of God being given instruction that they were to communicate to the children in their midst. You see Jesus and you see the pattern being followed consistently with Jesus adopting the approach of the Old Testament, "The children are welcome here with me," as they mingle among the adults and hear the instruction of the Lord.

Let's look, thirdly now, at children and the apostles. Children and the New Testament letters. And we have to take a little bit of an indirect route to get to this point. Look at the book of Colossians, if you will, the book of Colossians, that letter by the Apostle Paul. Colossians 4:16. Now a year or two ago, the years go by so quickly it's hard for me to keep a chronological sequence straight, we looked at on a Tuesday evening, we looked at the reality of the letters of the apostles in the life of the New Testament church and we

saw something about how those letters were distributed and what we find as we turn here is that the letters that Paul wrote, he expected and required to be read publicly in the worship of the gathering of the people of God.

Look at Colossians 4:16, this letter that Paul sent to the city of Colossae, to the church at that city, he intended for broader circulation than just that one church. He said in verse 16,

16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

So Paul sends these letters with the expectation that they are going to be read in the corporate gathering of the people of God at the time that he wrote the letters. That bears on our topic today. Who was going to hear them? Who would hear those letters?

Well, look back a chapter at Colossians 3, Paul addresses segments within the church who would obviously be hearing what he had written and in chapter 3, verse 18 of Colossians, he says,

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

He knew that wives were going to be there and so he addresses them with the vocative and says, "Wives, here is what I require of you. Here is the implication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on your daily life, wives, you are to be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." Fair enough. Verse 19, he addresses the counterpart there to the wives and he says,

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

He knew husbands would be there. He knew wives would be there. Verse 21,

21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children,

I'm skipping verse 20 deliberately to make my point. Verse 22, slaves you do this. Chapter 4, verse 1, masters you do this, addressing different segments of the one body with specific instructions for how they are to respond to the teaching that was found earlier in the epistle. In that great context where he is addressing specific subjects within the church, he says in chapter 3, verse 20,

20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

There is a presupposition that is right there on the surface that there would be children present in the gathering of the people of God to hear what Paul had to say to them. He

addresses them directly on the expectation that they would be there when the letter was read and would hear what he had to say to them.

Go back to Ephesians 6, turning back to the left in your Bible just two books, skipping over Philippians to Ephesians, going in that direction. Chapter 6, verse 1. Ephesians and Colossians are really parallel letters, not identical but they follow a similar train of thought, and he has done the same thing here in Ephesians that he did in Colossians. Wives, verse 22. Husbands, verse 25. Chapter 6, verse 1,

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 so that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.

Beloved, the point that I'm making here is simple but I personally believe that it is profound. Paul expected children to be present when his letters were read among the churches. They weren't separated out from the adults. They weren't sent away into another location while the adults had the instruction. The children were there present with the adults when that happened. Wow. That's what happened with the ministry of Jesus, children present with the adults hearing what the Teacher had to say which was consistent with the Old Testament pattern. Throughout the course of a thousand years or more of recorded biblical history, time and time again the children present with the people of God. The expectation that the families were coming together, the parents were coming together and their children were there with them.

Now, what does that mean for us here at our church? By the way, for those of you that are visiting, I made the point last time, you really do have to hear today's message in the context of last week's message, but just for those of you that are visiting where this term might be of consequence to you, Truth Community Church is not affiliated with the Family Integrated Church movement. We are not associated with them. We might have affinities of belief with them but we are not affiliated with them in any formal way whatsoever and so we should not assume that what is true of Family Integrated churches is necessarily true of our church. We're just dealing with things on a much more simple, plain, direct, elementary basis, you might say, in what we're doing here in these two messages. But here's the bottom line: at Truth Community Church, we look at this Old Testament pattern, this pattern with Jesus, this pattern in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and we believe this, we think that these numerous biblical examples set an expectation of children being present when the people of God meet for worship; that when the adults come together in the primary corporate worship of the church body, that the children are going to be there with them. That's what we think Scripture points us to. That's the direction that we see from Scripture and that's why we do things the way that we do.

Let me state it as I like to do, state it in the negative way. You state truth in a positive way, do this, in a negative way, don't do that. Well, positively we see these biblical examples and we say, "We think that sets a precedent, a model that deserves our respect and deference and somehow to emulate that as the pattern by which we structure church life, especially Sunday by Sunday." That's the positive side of it. On the negative side to

state it differently coming at it from the opposite direction, we certainly do not see any biblical precedent, let me say that again, this is so important, every word important here, we certainly do not see any biblical precedent, any biblical example of separating children from adults on a regular basis when the people of God gather for worship. We don't see that modeled in Scripture and we think the positive and negative side of that has implications for the way that church should be done.

Now as I also said last time but again it bears repeating and it's important to understand the spirit with which we say these things: we realize that as we take that position, that we are in a minority. We realize that a lot of other people see it differently. Some view youth ministry as a manner of entertaining the children and view that as their job so they take them away, bring them to children's church or whatever and they just try to keep them happy with videos and things like that so that week by week the child thinks that he had a good time at church. We realize, we respect the fact that there are churches who practice youth ministry who are trying to provide biblical instruction in their time and they are trying to do it in an honorable way. We respect that and as I said last time, we don't view this point as a point of separation or a point of criticism. To them, to those friends who do it differently than what we do, it's so important to understand the spirit in which we hold these things, we realize that there is a broad swath of difference in the way people who do youth ministry do it, and for some it's a circus, for some it's more serious, but we come back to Scripture and say we see something and we want to do it a little bit differently than that. We like it, we want, we think it honors Scripture to bring our children into the worship services and even to sit under the teaching of a 60 minute sermon week by week. We think that is a good thing, not to be pushed aside and rejected, and I'm going to give you a lot of reasons here in a few moments to justify that position.

Now, youth ministry advocates, the ones that are honest will admit up front, "Yes, I understand there is no biblical basis for a youth ministry. You cannot point to chapter and verse in Scripture that supports the concept of a youth ministry." They'll at least acknowledge that and you say, "Well then, why do you do what you do?" And their response will be, they will support their methodology by saying, "Well, these are the goals that we are trying to accomplish." They will tell stories about the people that have been reached through their youth ministry. Okay, that's the argument that they have to make but, beloved, here's what I want you to see. This is so very crucial because there is more than children's ministry at stake in what I am about to say. That kind of argumentation, "But look at the results, look at what we do." Well, last time, going on a tangent here, last time we cited statistics that show anywhere between 70 and 80% of people brought up in youth ministry are not even in a church two years after they leave home and are in college. Those aren't great statistics to vindicate the approach that is suggested as the norm, but the other thing that I would say about that, this idea, "But look at the children that are here," what you need to see and recognize, whatever else you think about this is to realize this: to talk about results is not a biblical argument. To talk about results is not to provide a theological rationale for what you are doing. Beloved, pragmatism has been used to justify a lot of really bad ministry. Pragmatism has been justified as, "But look at the crowds that we draw," when up north they do a rodeo in their worship center. When lights and dancers and different things are done and increasingly

church service has simply become a sensual experience of loud music and visual stimulation with lights and fog, and people are not responding to the proclaimed truth but responding to emotional stimulus and you say, "But look at the large crowds that we have here." That's not a way to think. That is not a way to do ministry. That is not a biblical philosophy of doing things and all that I'm saying here is that if we're going to do ministry, we need to be able to have a biblical rationale for what we do. Open a Bible and make your case. Explain why youth ministry is such a recent phenomenon if it is something that is essential to the church of Jesus Christ.

So here at Truth Community, we don't expect other churches to have to do it our way. We have our critique of it but, you know, we're not trying to Lord it over them. What we're doing here is saying, what we want to do, we want to ground our ministry on something that is more secure. We see an unchanging pattern repeated throughout the 2,000 years of biblical history and when the national pattern, the national pattern of youth ministry produces bad fruit long-term, or at least very little in the way of lasting fruit compared to the immense resources that are devoted to it, we feel the freedom, the liberty and the justification to step back and say, "No, thank you. We'll do something else. We'll do something different." Now, we believe that young people benefit from corporate gatherings like this in a way that youth ministry advocates either overlook or diminish and here in what I'm about to say in the rest of the message is designed to give those, especially those of you who have young children, you young families that deal with fidgety kids sitting beside you and the distraction that they can be while you're trying to listen, and you're getting your kids up and getting them ready and just the hustle and bustle of Sunday morning is a challenge, I understand that. You know, Nancy and I lived that. I am sympathetic to that and here's what I want you to see, is that it's easy to lose sight of the long-term benefit, of the long-term fruit that you are cultivating when you are in the midst of that week to week battle, challenge, all of that, and I want to help you see the big picture.

You know, there is a sense in which, a sense in which, it's an overstatement, this is an overstatement, but there is a sense in which everything that we do as a church is geared toward, is looking toward the long term. Ultimately when we preach the Gospel long term, we want to see people in heaven with us. We want to see sinners reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, to have their sins forgiven so that long term it will be well with them and be well with their souls. In terms of time, you know, we're thinking about where are we going to be as a church five, 10, 20 years from now. We have long-term objectives and that means that we are content with the fact that from day to day, from week to week, it may not seem like too much is happening, we realize that the problems of today will be forgotten tomorrow so that – oh, this is so very important – so that we don't let the problems of today determine what we do tomorrow because the problems of today are going to be forgotten tomorrow. So we're trying to ground things in Scripture with a long-term view and perspective but we understand that it's easy to lose sight of that.

Well, what happens when you young families bring consistently your children with you to church and you fight that battle, you deal with the inconsistency of it, you resist the

temptation to do something else or to stay-at-home or, you know, "I just want somebody to take these kids off my hands, if you would, please"? Well, what I'm about to give you are what I believe are five practical goals, five practical benefits of the way that we do things that I'm not going to quote Scripture for but I believe are certainly consistent with biblical principles and I think that are actually undeniable in what I'm about to say. Practical points. Words of encouragement for you young families that are fighting this battle, that are striving to grow here. And let me say this just on behalf of the elders, certainly on behalf of myself: you young families, you that are bringing your infants and bringing your toddlers here on a consistent basis, you are one of the greatest encouragements to me in my ministry, one of the greatest encouragements to the elder board and to those that are thinking properly, you are one of the greatest encouragements to this entire church body because we understand that it's a challenge. We understand that there are difficulties with parenting and there are frustrations and yet week by week to be here on a faithful consistent basis, manifesting your love for Christ, your love for Scripture, and your love for your children, and your love for the people of God, that is a mark of the blessing of God on your life and through his blessing on you, he is blessing all of the rest of us. That is of critical importance and I would say also this, that there is a sense in which we do it this way for you and for your children. Whether we could do it better, whether we could do it differently, you know, you can debate that another time but we are doing what we believe is biblical and what we believe is best for the long-term benefit of your family and the long-term benefit of the souls of your children. That's why we're doing it. It's not because this attracts a bigger crowd. It doesn't. As I said last time, I accept the fact that people come and do a U-turn in our church when they see that we don't have what they traditionally associate with youth ministry. I'm okay with that because we're not doing it for them, we're doing it for you and because it is our deep conviction that this is what is best over the long term.

So what are those benefits? I'll give you five. First of all, if you're writing these things down, and here's another thing for those of you that are not, you're beyond that stage in your family or you're not married, you can help us reinforce these things. You can affirm a corporate understanding of these things builds church unity for all. 1. What happens when ministry is done this way, when youth ministry is done this way? To state it one last time before I go into this. I know, tangent after tangent. Does this guy have a logical progression to his thought at all or not? Well, sometimes maybe not. Simply stated in one sentence, what is our philosophy of youth ministry at Truth Community Church? Our philosophy is to include the youth in the ministry. Our philosophy is to include the youth in the ministry. We talked about the things that the youth have available for them last time and I'm not repeating it here.

What's the benefit of this? 1. Families are brought together in worship and in teaching. Families are brought together in worship and in teaching. Do you know what happens when you bring your young ones faithfully, consistently week after week? You know, and that's kind of a premise of this, is that it presupposes a consistency and the family being here week by week. Do you know what happens? Your children learn to place a priority on the gathering of the saints. They see that there is an importance to be placed on being with the people of God to encourage them and to receive encouragement from

them. They learn that as a pattern of life and the love of the brethren is one of the marks of a true Christian. They learn something critical by this pattern. They see the place of the word of God in worship rather than being conditioned by videos and games and flannel graphs and whatever else they're using to do children's ministry these days. I know no one is using a flannel graph in the day of PowerPoint. I'm just dating myself here. I'll go from this message to retirement. You say, "Yeah, chronologically that probably works." But rather than getting a sense that church is about these avenues of entertainment, what they learn week by week over time is that there is a place and a priority for the preaching of the word of God in worship and that will change their perspective on what they look for in churches when they grow up and go out on their own. In the meantime as your children sit in public worship with you as parents, they are going to naturally ask questions. "I heard him say this. What does that mean? What's the deal with communion? I saw a man going under water, tell me about that. What does that mean?" And all of a sudden your pattern of corporate worship has given you a platform to instruct your children at a level you know that they can understand about some of the most basic fundamental things of the faith, and your presence in public worship with your children becomes a major tool of discipleship in their lives.

We think that's a good thing. This becomes a springboard to important talks with parents and their children. Families who sit under the same teaching week by week by week can discuss it meaningfully after the service, teach it meaningfully throughout the week. You as a parent can draw upon other things from the past that you know your children have heard that suddenly now are relevant to what's going on in their lives. And look, undergirding all that I just said is a most fundamental conviction, that God's ministry preeminently happens through his word; that it is through his word where he has made himself known. It is through his word that he instructs his people. It is through his word that he draws sinners to Christ and therefore when your children learn the priority of the word through what happens on a Sunday or on a Tuesday, you are building in them a fundamental conviction that can shape them for all of their lives. I freely admit, I gladly acknowledge the fact that that's not easily quantifiable. It's not the same as saying, "We had 42 people in our junior's class this morning and that was a worldwide record for us. Good for us. Attendance records in the children's ministry." I realize I can't quantify what I'm talking about here but you don't assert biblical priorities by arithmetic.

So number 1: families are brought together in worship and teaching. Parents explain things according to their child's maturity, their questions, and over time repeatedly children absorb the truth. Secondly, why do we do this the way that we do? Because secondly, children learn the hymns of the faith. Children learn the hymns of the faith. Little minds are sponges, especially when they are joined with the wonder of music and we believe that long-lasting benefit is achieved when children learn the great hymns of the faith and sing them alongside their parents. We believe that there is a significance when you as a parent are singing to the glory of God, singing with attentiveness, singing out and without you even knowing it, little eyes are looking up and watching and learning from your example, saying, "Oh, this is important to mom, this is important to dad therefore there is something in me that is attracted and wants the importance of that for myself as well." And what happens when children learn in the natural course of being

with adults in worship? They take this priority of the word of God forward in life with them. They take this love of the hymns forward in life with them and they are less vulnerable, I won't say invulnerable, they are less vulnerable to the forces of spiritual darkness that will come upon them soon enough trying to pull them and suck them away. Look, it's just a matter of time before children who are raised in an entertainment based youth ministry model, it's just a matter of time before something sinful and wicked comes and promises them something even more enjoyable than what they have been mollified with in the past. When you cater to a desire of a child, what he wants in the moment, you are setting him up for failure later on when an enticement that sounds so pleasurable is presented to him and he has the opportunity to act on it. So with this priority of the word of God, with this knowledge of the great hymns of the faith that connect them not only to a particular local church but connect them with generations of saints that have gone on before them, they have a personal possession, a personal conviction to draw upon when the trials and challenges and questions of life inevitably come. There is a reflex response, "Oh, what does Scripture say about this? When peace like a river, attendeth my way. When sorrows like sea billows roll." And you have positioned them for a response to those trials by what you have put in their minds along the way.

Thirdly, I think all of these are important: children develop inter-generational relationships. Children develop inter-generational relationships. This Friday, we're having a youth fellowship here in our church for those that are graduating sixth grade and coming out of twelfth grade. I can't tell you – this is just an illustration – I can't tell you how delighted I am, how cool I think it is that they are going to have the opportunity to interact personally with Dr. Snelling, to hear him speak, to hear his conviction, and then to interact with him around a dinner table. Don't you see that an opportunity like that is of great value?

I love that the children in our church know the elders by name and feel free to approach us like anyone else in the church; that the elders aren't somebody removed and indifferent to them, not knowing them, not caring about them. They know that's not true if they are regular here. And what we believe is that we believe that when children are around growing Christian adults, mature Christian believers, that they benefit from that; that they see examples, that they see things modeled for them that benefit them throughout life and we believe that that dynamic produces long-term unity in the church and quality discipleship even if it is less measurable. Look, I don't need to tell you this which is a silly way to introduce something you're about to say. I don't need to tell you this. Let me tell you that in some places in some churches, you could live your whole life and never be integrated into anything other than your own age group. You can start out in the nursery, go into the children's ministry, junior high you are grouped with them, grouped with your high school, grouped with the singles, grouped with the young marrieds and then the middle adults and then the older adults and then they bury you, and all of your interactions have been with your age peers. Well, that doesn't happen here. We don't think that's healthy. We think what's healthy is what's a reflection of life. I like the fact that our children see an older guy like Larry B. being up here week after week, learning by example what faithfulness looks like. I like that. I like the fact that they see the same faces in adults week after week, month after month. I like the fact when children run up

to adults that aren't specifically in their family but they know that they love and they respond to them that way. I think that's very positive.

Fourthly, children learn that church does not exist to please them. Children learn that church does not exist to please them. When children are in worship services, they learn to subordinate their desires to the greater corporate desire to honor God in our gatherings. They realize they are a part of something that is larger than they are; that the fact that they might want to get up and run around today can wait while the worship is being done. Taking these things together, beloved, what your children learn is this: is that they learn that they are a part of a whole, that they serve and have a part in rather than expecting the whole to serve them and to serve their desires.

Finally, fifthly, modest youth ministry expectations help families. Modest youth ministry expectations help families. And I realize when you do it this way and there is not a whole lot of glitter and glamour to things, that it's easy to say, "I want a king like the other nations around us." I get that but, beloved, here's what we believe, here's why we do this: we believe that families thrive with fewer activities. We believe that the routine and the stability of family life in the home cultivates a stable environment in which children can flourish rather than constantly running after new activities three, four, five, six times a week, rather than having activities taking you away from Sunday corporate worship six, eight, 10, 12, 14 times a year. We believe that and here's the thing with ongoing youth activities as a weekly aspect of life, that added to this or camps and different things like that and thinking about it as a family, thinking about it as a mom and dad and you're trying to balance your work and taking care of the place and feeding your kids and you've got all of these other things that are going on in life, then on top of that you're expected to have your youth at four, five, six events a month. Well, here at Truth, we encourage families to be at home with each other. We think that's healthy. We think that's stable. We think children flourish in that regular environment and can I say something else, just be really practical here? I won't even mention the financial expectations that those things place on families, either paying several hundred dollars for the next youth camp to attend, or you are approached by a family who can't afford that and you're asked to pay for their children to attend, or the church budget is expected to be able to carry \$50-60,000 to support a youth pastor and his benefits and the things that attend the conduction of a youth ministry. This simplifies a lot what we're talking about here today.

And there's another thing that I won't mention. I'm being ironic in what I say here, I know. There's another thing I won't mention. I won't mention that which I know has affected some of you a little further down the road in life. I won't mention this: I won't mention the many times where a misguided youth pastor or a misguided youth worker has substituted his judgment for the parents in a difficult situation with their child. I really don't like it when youth, so-called youth workers line themselves up with their children against their parents in things that the parents are trying to accomplish. They are in no position to do that and that is not their place. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, and so very often, so very often when conflict and family inevitably comes to the surface, the parents find themselves on the receiving end of rebuke from a youth worker when the

Scripture tells their children to obey their parents in the Lord for this is right. I won't even mention that.

At our church, just to give you a sense of how this plays out in our church, when young people in their middle teens come and they've been converted to Christ and they want to be baptized, we welcome that but we ask them and say, "Have you talked to your parents first? Do your parents know that you're here?" Then we will go and we will talk with the parents and say, "Do you support your child's desire to be baptized? Do you see in your child marks of regeneration? Do they seem to have, does it look to you like they've been born again? You're the one who sees them 24/7, not us." So we try to bring the parents in just as a reflection of this overall philosophy.

So why do we do it this way? We look at the Old Testament, we look at Jesus, we see the apostles, we think it points us in that direction of the children being with us. What are the benefits? I've given you five. It brings families together in worship. Children learn the hymns of the faith. They develop cross-generational relationships. They learn that church does not exist to please them. Modest youth ministry expectations help families manage their time, manage their finances. All of those things matter to us.

You know, there is one more thing that I'll say. It's not in my notes but I think about it a lot is that there is another aspect to this. This is another aspect that I won't mention is that when we gather together like this, the children, the young people are with us among the adults, there is a level of transparency and accountability that's healthy. They haven't been taken off into a room by themselves with their peers, many of whom may not be saved, many of whom may just be looking for a mark to fight for a boyfriend or girlfriend. Here while we can't protect against that kind of thing absolutely, there is an increased level of accountability. There are eyes on everyone and with everything that happens and accountability is healthy, especially for young people and also for those youth workers who work with them.

So is it different than what other churches do? Sure. Is that a reason not to do it this way? No, it's not. Is this the perfect way, is this the final comprehensive answer? No, we don't present it that way but hopefully you can see why we do what we do, what we think the benefits of it are, and as I said last time, we believe that down the road five, 10, 15, 20 years, we'll see the fruit of it that we can't see today in our limited vision.

So what is our philosophy of youth ministry? We include the youth in the ministry. We want them with us. We like that. So what we would not do, we would not establish a separate children's church where the children come in for the first half of the service and then they are sent out. We won't ever do that. We will never do that. We would not have a Sunday school hour that conflicted with the main service. You see, parents, and you see, young people, children as I speak to you, the overarching predominant thing that I would have you take away from that is this: is that we love you enough that we want you with us. You matter to us. You're important to us. You are the object of our prayers. You are in our minds as we preach and teach and we care about you enough that we want you with us when we gather together. Whatever else we do by way of youth ministry in the

future will somehow be consistent with these principles and our prayer as we offer this philosophy up to God to those who hear, is that God would bless this approach to the glory of Christ, to the conversion of many children and their long-term spiritual growth, and that their lives would then turn to be a blessing to many others as well. That's what we do. That's why we do it.

Let's pray together before our Lord.

Father, we thank you for the many children in our midst. We pray for the young families that are seeking to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Father, we would hold these things humbly but clearly. We would hold them in transparency so that men would know why we do what we do. But Lord, ultimately we would hold this before you in a vertical way, asking you to see and to bless our desire, as best we can to see something of a biblical pattern that we want to follow, to have long-term spiritual good for families and children in mind, and ask you to bless that as we move forward. Father, for those that are here that are not in Christ, that they do not know Christ personally themselves, we ask you to lead them into your word that reveals a Savior who made a blood atonement for sinners just like them, and that your Spirit would lead them to faith in Christ. Bless our church, Lord. Bless us in unity. Bless us in maturity, Father, and whatever that means for numbers, we let that come and go as it pleases you. But Father, help us to be faithful as we seek to honor you in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.