

**INTRODUCTION:****A. LAST WEEK'S EPISODE**

Last week in worship Pastor Brown preached on God's perspective on children and consequently their value and worth as boys and girls created in the image of God. This morning I want to piggy back on that theme but approach it from a different angle; namely the God-given role and importance of adults of faith in the lives of children – the importance of adults of faith in the lives of children.

I've chosen this brief passage because it gives us a marvelous insight into what it means to be a godly parent, a godly father or mother, a godly grandparent or great-grandparent, even a godly parental figure within the body of Christ – specifically in regard to the spiritual lives of our children, grandchildren, or the children God entrusts to us in this church.

Tucked into Jesus' unbelievably crowded schedule we find this “gem” if you will; three short verses about some parents and their extended families who are bringing their young children, babies in fact to Jesus.

**B. INTERVIEW PARENTS W/ LITTLE ONES** (please listen to CD to hear the interview)

## 1. Introduce parents and child

- \* Chris and Katie Tiege (Caleb) at 8:30am
- \* Elson and Larissa Liu (Aaron) at 10am
- \* Tom and Jessica Titus (Jakob) at 11:30am

## 2. Ask a few brief questions

- \* How old is child?
- \* Is child your 1<sup>st</sup>?
- \* Still want to keep him or planning on mailing him back to North Pole?
- \* Does he know how to say “no” yet? Think you will have to teach him?
- \* What has been your greatest joy as a parent thus far?
- \* When you think of the future and the kind of young man you want (...) to become, what is most important to you regarding your son?

## 3. Pray for each family and child in particular (Aaron's benediction from Numbers 6)

## **BRING ON THE BABIES!**

*Leaving our kids an inheritance worth having requires...*

### **I. MODELING SO OUR CHILDREN CAN “SEE” WHAT GOD LOOKS LIKE IN HUMAN FLESH**

(The Basic Requirement)

#### **GOD WITH SKIN ON**

Many people find it hard to believe in a God they can't "see." They want a God "with skin on" as it were. That is why in part, God sent His Son, Jesus, Emmanuel, God in human flesh.

Of all the different words, titles, and imageries used in the Bible to describe, express, or attempt to explain the various aspects of God's character, it is instructive that predominant metaphor / image Jesus uses for God is that of a loving "father" figure. In fact, God is called a "Father" almost 200x in the four gospels, and over half of those occurrences (approx, 122), are found in John's gospel alone.

So it would seem that when it comes to children, God has assigned to both parents, but particularly to us men, a unique responsibility, opportunity, and privilege to model (in some imperfect manner of course), for our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren – the little ones, teens, college students and young adults in our church – as to who God the Heavenly Father is, what He is like.

Now, that doesn't mean women have no role, nor are they second class citizens in God's kingdom – but rather that they have a significant, albeit different role to play in the spiritual development of children.

But apart from issues of gender, this event in the day and life of Jesus makes it very clear that for the Christian parent or grandparent, being a father or mother is first and foremost a spiritual event. It reminds us that for the Christian, parenting is a calling – a God-given vocation, not unlike being a missionary, preacher or teacher.

And if we are going to leave behind an inheritance worth having for the next generation, we are going to need to learn how to model what a loving father and mother, grandfather or grandmother, etc. actually looks like in human flesh. And for that to happen, one must learn how to be...

#### **A. ADULTS WHO ARE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE SPIRITUAL MATTERS PRIORITY #1**

##### **BRINGING THEIR BABIES TO JESUS**

While this scene may appear somewhat strange to us in our day, it was customary in Jesus' day for Jewish parents to bring children to their local rabbi to receive a blessing – a prayer to God on their behalf. Unlike our supposedly advanced, modern world people of faith in that day looked upon their children as a blessing and not a burden. Children were viewed as a rich treasure from God and not an economic liability – a treasure entrusted by God to our care – a treasure entrusted first and foremost to parents for the child's spiritual well being, growth, and development.

Psalm 127 reminds us that "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him... Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Ps. 127:3, 5). And in the very next Psalm, the Psalmist closes with blessing, "May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life... and may you live to see your children's children (128:6).

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?

Question: Why are these folks expending so much energy and effort to bring their children to Jesus? Why are they willing to do so, especially in the face of the disciples and others who thought Jesus had more important matters to attend to? Just one look at the long lines snaking around the Judean countryside should have made that clear enough.

What then is so doggone important about their kids meeting Jesus anyway – so important that these parents refuse to take no for an answer? After all, most of these kids have no idea who Jesus even is, or what was going on around them. Why? What is so important to these folks that they want their kids to meet Jesus?

Answer: It was all so that Jesus might “*touch them*” (Lk. 18:15 - NIV).

Now does that mean the disciples clear a narrow aisle in the crowd, the parents have about a minute and a half each to tell Jesus that their child has been a very good little boy or girl, and so, they would like Jesus to send them a new pair of Lebron James autographed camel skin sandals for Christmas? Is all this commotion so Jesus can then “touch them” – pat the little darlings on the head and say “Next!”?

No, the word that the NIV translates as “touch,” is not merely the idea that these folks wanted their little ones to have physical contact with Jesus – although that might be true. These parents want Jesus to “bless” their children much like the rabbis of that day would often do. Mark in his account makes this very clear, “*And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them*” (Mk. 10:16). It is a custom dating back to the time of the patriarch Israel (or perhaps even earlier), who before he died laid his hands upon Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Manasseh and he “*blessed them*” (Gen. 48:14).

## A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS – IN THIS CASE MORE

If a picture is worth a thousand words then, picture these parents handing their little ones to Jesus – as He takes them in His arms, places His hand upon their heads, lifts His eyes to heaven and asks God the Father to watch over and “bless” them.

This is something that I have done for each of our grandchildren, the first time I was finally able to wrench them from their grandmother so I could get a few brief minutes to hold each of them in my arms. It is nothing that I ever announced to anyone else as I was doing it. I simply took whatever grandchild had been born at the time in my arms and silently prayed to God for the protection, spiritual growth and salvation. And I would close my prayer with these words “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you (His) peace*” (Num. 6:24-26). I have now been blessed to do that seven times.

These folks are bringing their babies to Jesus so that he would “bless” them. And how Jesus responds to their request is even more amazing when you realize that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when this all happens (Lk. 17:1; 18:31). Though Jesus knows He is on His way to Jerusalem to suffer and die, He still has time for the little ones – the babies. By the way, that means He also has time for you this morning – if you will humble yourself as a little child and come – just as you are – but come.

## JUST WHO ARE THESE PUSHY “PEOPLE”?

These are ordinary, everyday, salt of the earth folks – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, extended family members and friends – people who are bringing their children to Jesus – people who are connected in some way

to the families represented. These are parents who whether they realize it or not are introducing their children to God – and doing so from very early on.

These are parents for whom spiritual matters are of great importance in their own lives and marriages. Otherwise they wouldn't have gone to all the effort to find and meet Jesus – to want their children blessed by Christ in the first place. The actions of these folks suggest that they had a certain level of faith in Jesus – enough for them to believe that Jesus could and/or would do something wonderful for their kids.

These are parents who are taking the initiative / leadership for the spiritual development of their children. They are parents, who in the process are modeling for their kids what is really of true value, of lasting importance in life. These are parents who are exposing their children to the things of God – from the earliest days of their child's life – parents who are wise enough to begin the process of spiritual growth and development from day one.

### **IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY**

And their actions are a reminder that it is never too early to begin planting spiritual seeds in a child's heart – so that they have time to grow and mature into a genuine and vibrant life of faith. And in our day there are a vast array of books, CDs, etc. to aid us in that task.

If you are not sure where to begin talk with Bonnie Linder or one of the folks in Children's Ministry for the latest and best resources available. If you have a teen living in your home, talk to Sally Jo Friday or Nick McDonald in our Youth Ministry for ideas and counsel. If you have no kids but would like to rent one for a day, week, or even longer contact Pastor Brown – perhaps he would “loan” you one or more so that you can get a taste of what it is like. ☺

### **PARENTS – THE FRONT LINE ON THE BATTLEFIELD**

The truth is that God calls parents to be the front line in the battlefield for the souls of our children. God calls husbands and wives to be the primary models of what genuine spirituality is all about. God calls parents to lead by providing an example for their children to follow. And that begins with your own personal relationship with Christ. It requires that you take the initiative in spiritual matters. It means that following Jesus must be the number one priority in your own life.

And it requires that you take the initiative by bringing them to church when they are children – you being in a adult education class while they are – you participating in worship alongside the kids – you letting them see you putting an offering in the plate – you letting them see you reading your Bible, doing your devotions at home – you reading Bible stories to them when they are young – you praying with them before they go to bed at night and leading in prayer time at meals.

In other words we can't sit back, dump the kids off at church, never darken the doors of the church, and then criticize the church for failing our families. It means one can't make spirituality an “add on” to your already overscheduled life - squeeze God in, whenever you have a free slot in your calendar.

*Modeling means that you and I have to make spiritual matters priority #1. It also means we look to Christ in faith to draw our children to Him...*

## **B. THE KIND OF PARENT WHO LOOKS TO GOD TO DO THE SAME THING FOR YOUR CHILDREN THAT HE HAS DONE FOR YOU**

Again, why are these parents bringing their children to Jesus? Answer: to have him touch them. That is to have Jesus pronounce a “blessing” – which Jesus did gladly and joyfully.

Why? Because for two thousand years before Jesus walked the earth, since the days of Abraham, parents (on the basis of their own faith in God’s promises) have looked to God to “bless” their children. Families of faith have looked to God and asked him to bring their child / children to a genuine knowledge and experience of salvation. And such parents have done and still do so on the basis of God’s promises in the Scriptures – promises which are not only true for us as adults, but for our children as well.

It is as Peter explains to the crowd gathered on the day of Pentecost, “*the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call*” (Acts 2:39).

### **CHILDREN WHO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET JESUS**

Bottom line: These babies are enjoying a wonderful privilege for they are getting to meet Jesus. And while they aren’t even aware of what is going on, these children are getting to meet God. And they are doing so, primarily because their father, mother, grandparents are taking the initiative in making sure that it happened. These folks didn’t “cop out” and leave that job to the church.

It is you and I as the parents, grandparents, who have to make a vital, active relationship with Jesus Christ the number one priority in our own life & marriage – if we expect to have any chance of influencing our kids for Christ. It means we must take advantage of the marriage seminars, parenting seminars, men’s and women’s retreats, etc. when made available to us. It means that you must model your own need and desire to grow in your Christian life by taking advantage of the many faith education classes offered at Cornerstone. Ultimately, it means a daily dependence and walk with Christ within the four walls of your own home.

We all know that when it comes to what we consider the big / important events in our kids lives, we can and will make all kinds of arrangements, sacrifices, adjustments to be there if at all possible – whether it is athletic tournaments, band festivals, graduations and the like. How much time, energy, and effort are we willing to extend to model for our kids what genuine Christianity is all about?

*In order to leave your kids an inheritance worth having ...*

One needs to be a father, mother, grandparent of faith – a person with a living, growing, maturing relationship with Christ. One needs to take the initiative in bringing your children to Christ – introducing your children to the things of God and His people of faith within the context of a healthy local church body. One needs to be a father, mother, grandparent of faith, who as an expression / outgrowth of your own relationship with God, looks to Christ to do the same thing for your children as God has done for you. Bottom line: a person of faith whose life (yes imperfectly) yet characteristically reflects the qualities of their Father in Heaven.

## **C. A PARENT WHOSE OWN LIFE CHARACTERISTICALLY REFLECTS THE QUALITIES OF HIS / HER HEAVENLY FATHER**

### **SUPER SIZED SAINTS**

These are parents who, if we could get to know them, are not super “saints” in the sense of perfect – such folks simply don’t exist on planet earth. Parenting is one of those jobs that by the time you learn the skills needed, you realize that are out of work.

These parents a far from perfect, but they are folks who by their actions are modeling the proper kinds of priorities in life for their children, grandchildren, etc. (And by way of application modeling for us as well.)

They are parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who (whether they even realize it or not), are in the process creating a spiritual heritage, legacy, or inheritance for their kids – the next generation. They are leaving for their little ones an inheritance that is worth having –one that lasts for all eternity.

The old adage is still true: values are more often caught than taught.

### **CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE<sup>1</sup>**

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval, he leans to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

- Dorothy Law Nolte

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Law Nolte, *Children Learn What They Live*. Workman Publishers, NY; 1998.

## **IN HIS STEPS<sup>2</sup>**

Dr. William Mitchell tells the story of a day when two grandparents were walking with their young grandson. The area in which they were walking had poison ivy growing in it, and their grandson was wearing shorts, so the grandfather told his grandson to “Watch your step. There’s poison ivy.” He didn’t hear any response from his grandson so he repeated the warning, “There is poison ivy in this area, so watch where you walk.”

To which his grandson replied, “Don’t worry grandpa, I’m just walking in your steps.”

Sure enough when the grandfather turned around, the boy was carefully placing his feet where his grandfather had made an imprint.

## **PRIORITIES<sup>3</sup>**

A 100 years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove. But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.

(Author unknown)

## **WHAT WE CANNOT EXPECT**

We can’t expect our kids to have their own devotional time of reading the Bible and prayer if we don’t. We can’t expect worship to be a priority for our kids if it isn’t for us. We can’t expect our kids to understand the value / importance of giving to God out of sheer gratitude for His grace, if we don’t. We can’t expect them to be teachable in matters of faith if we ourselves aren’t teachable. We can’t expect them to take advantage of the opportunities afforded in this local body if we aren’t taking advantage of the same kinds of opportunities to know and grow in Christ ourselves. We can’t expect kids to take Jesus seriously when He said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” if we aren’t willing to do so. And we can’t leave for our kids an inheritance worth having unless we as their parents, grandparents, etc., model for them the character qualities of our heavenly Father.

## **THE CHURCH’S ROLE IN ALL THIS**

The church has a role in all this as well. The local church exists in part to supplement, support, and assist families toward that end. That is why we offer faith education classes not just for kids and teens, but for adults as well. It is why our Children’s and Youth ministries work so tirelessly to do what they do. It is why we want adults present and serving in our VBS – whether it is here at Cornerstone or down at Military Ave in Southwest Detroit. It is why we offer Spring Hill, and Summer Mission Trips, and the like. And it is also why we want our children and teens to be present, participating in worship with the rest of this body. It is all done so that we are desirous of exposing our kids to what it means to be part of real family – the forever family of God in Jesus Christ.

And in the process we are modeling for them so that in God’s time they will want to come to Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> William Mitchell and Michael Mitchell, *Building Strong Families: How Your Family Can Withstand the Challenges Of Today’s Culture*. Broadman & Holman Publishers; Nashville 1997, p.222.

<sup>3</sup> Forest E. Witcraft, (1984-1967).

## **II. MODELING FOR THEM SO THAT (IN GOD’S WAY & GOD’S TIME) OUR KIDS WILL WANT TO COME TO CHRIST**

**(The Ultimate Purpose / Reason For Doing All This)**

### **A. SO THAT ALONG THE ROAD OF LIFE, THEY COME TO RECOGNIZE / UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN NEED FOR JESUS CHRIST**

#### **CHILDREN: THE CHURCH’S FUTURE<sup>4</sup>**

Fifty years ago a Philadelphia congregation watched as three 9-year-old boys were baptized and joined the church. Not long after, unable to continue with its dwindling membership, the church sold the building and disbanded.

One of those boys was Dr. Tony Campolo, author and Christian sociologist at Eastern College, Pennsylvania. Years later Campolo was doing research in his denominational archives. He decided to look up the church report for the year of his baptism. He found it and there was his name, the name of Dick White who became a missionary, and the name of Bert Newman, who became a professor of theology at an African seminary.

As Campolo read the rest of the church report for that year he found these words “It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost 27 members. Three joined, and they were only children.”

Jesus says, *“They may be only children, but you let them come to me!”*

#### **THE PHARISEE & TAX COLLECTOR (Lk. 18: 9-14)**

We don’t have the time this morning, but I would encourage you to read this entire chapter when you get home this afternoon. For what happens just before and after Jesus’ blessing the little ones is instructive in this regard – especially if we want our children and grandchildren not only come to recognize their own need for Jesus, but are receptive to His gracious invitation.

What does the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector have to do with our kids? Well nothing directly. But by application, if we want our kids to come to grips with the truth of Jesus’ story about the Pharisee & tax collector recorded just prior to this event (Lk. 18:9-14) – that it doesn’t matter how much better or worse, how more righteous they may appear or actually be in comparison to others around them. The issue is how we / how they measure up in God’s sight – a God who is absolutely holy, righteous and just.

And that means coming to grips with another truth that the apostle Paul learned when he wrote, “We all fall short – there are none who are righteous – no not one – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

We want our children to come to grips with the truth that God stands opposed to the proud – the self righteous, but that God extends grace, and only extends grace to the humble Prov. 3:34).

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<sup>4</sup> “Children: The Church’s Future”. PreachingToday.com; 3/15/2001.

## **THE RICH YOUNG RULER (Lk. 18: 18-30)**

Then there is what happens on the other side of this event, after Jesus blesses these little ones, where Luke records Jesus' interaction with the rich young ruler. Again, what does Jesus' interaction with a young Jewish Yuppie have to do with parenting? Well again, nothing directly. Except that by way of application we also want our young men and women to grasp that there isn't anything they can "do" to earn their way into heaven. We want them to come to grips with the truth that it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" (Lk. 18:25), than for them to earn their way. We want them to learn that the only thing you can "do" is "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved – you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

### **THE BOTTOM LINE:**

We want to model such things so our kids, grandkids, etc. recognize their need for a savior – the only savior God has provided – his name is Jesus. For "*There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12 ). We do all this so they will recognize their need, and so they are (in God's way and time) receptive to Jesus' gracious invitation.

### **B. SO THEY ARE RECEPTIVE TO JESUS' GRACIOUS INVITATION AND COME TO KNOW & GROW & GO FOR HIM**

Notice Jesus' focus however, is directed toward adults.

#### **"YOU LET THEM COME TO ME!"**

(By the way, wouldn't you have loved to be standing there and watching the expressions on the disciples faces after Jesus rebukes them and tells everyone to get out of the way so all these diaper bag, stroller toting families, and their snotty nosed, crying kids can take cuts and come to the head of the line?)

We who are adults in this room, not just the parents, but to all of us Jesus says, "**You**" – i.e. "You-all" are to make it possible (humanly speaking) for them to come to me. **You** give them every opportunity to be exposed to the things of God and his church. **You** give them the family life (both at home and here at church), where a personal relationship with God by grace through faith in Christ is as natural to them as the air they unconsciously receive and breathe every moment of every day.

We who are the adults in this fellowship – we are to let them see us worship. We are to let them see adults who pour out their souls in praise and prayer. We are to let them see adults who sit on the edge of their seats hungering and thirsting for righteousness as the Word of God is being offered. That is how it happens.

#### **"AND DO NOT HINDER THEM!"**

That is, don't you be a roadblock that stands in their way. Don't you be the stumbling block in their coming to know and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Don't you be the reason / excuse for their not being interested in what God has in store for them. Don't you be the person who is unwittingly used by Satan to poison, harden the hearts of your own children – to cause them to stumble because you continually serve "roast pastor" for lunch every Sunday after worship.

Jesus said that stumbling blocks are inevitable in a fallen world, but "*Woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to sin, so watch yourselves*" (Lk. 17:1-3).

The principle is applicable whether those children are your own – whether those children are in your extended family – or whether those children are in our church family.

## **EIGHT MEN OUT<sup>5</sup>: CAUSING OTHERS TO STUMBLE**

The movie, *Eight Men Out*, starring John Cusack and Charlie Sheen, is based on the Chicago White Sox baseball scandal of 1919. Many of the Sox players succumbed to the temptation to accepting bribes, in large part, because they felt cheated and demoralized by owner Charles Comiskey’s penny-pinching, hard-nosed ways. In time as players repeatedly found themselves on the receiving end of Comiskey’s manipulative ways, several succumbed to the temptation and opportunity to “throw” the World Series in exchange for large amounts of money. Eventually the scandal is exposed, and though the jury ultimately finds them not guilty, the commissioner of baseball bans the men from the Major Leagues for life.

There are two back to back scenes on which the rest of the movie hinges. In the first, Chick Gandil, one of the initial players who agrees to “throw” the Series, tries to convince their star pitcher on the team, Eddie Cicotte, to join in the scam. Eddie initially refuses, saying, “I make six grand a year. A lot of people are out of work.” So far so good – Eddie has handled the temptation well.

But in the very next scene, Eddie is standing in front of Charles Comiskey, who is seated at his desk in his office. Eddie is there to remind Comiskey of a promise he made – a promise to Eddie that if he would win 30 games this year, there would be a \$10 thousand bonus. When reminded of that promise, Comiskey asks his star pitcher how many games Eddie has won that year. The answer: 29.

Eddie argues that Comiskey had the pitching manager rest him for two weeks in August, resulting in him missing five starts. “I would have won at least two of those games. You know that.” Comiskey however insists that he had to rest his star pitcher for the upcoming series – that a man in his position has to keep the best interests of the club in mind.

Eddie, undeterred, firmly responds “I think you owe me that bonus.” To which Comiskey calmly says “Twenty-nine is not thirty, Eddie. You will get only the money you deserve.”

Eddie walks out of the office, and immediately goes to find Chick Gandil, the one who had offered the bribe earlier. And when the two meet Eddie tells Chick, “Ten grand. For the first game. Cash.”

And as Eddie walks away, Chick watches him, and a smile comes across his face.

Now while it is certainly true that Eddie Cicotte (as well as the others on his team who “threw” the 1919 World Series) was morally responsible for his actions – it can also be argued that Charles Comiskey is the one who created the stumbling block over which Eddie fell.

## **RECAP**

*If you want to leave behind an inheritance worth having, you will have to look to God, depending on His power to help you... I. Model (albeit in an imperfect way) So Our Children “See” What God Looks Like In Human Flesh. II. Model So Our Children Will Want To Come To Christ. And as you do know that you are...*

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<sup>5</sup> *Eight Men Out* (Orion, 1988 - PG); written by Eliot Asinof, directed by John Sayles.

### **III. MODELING SO OUR CHILDREN WILL KNOW WHAT IS OF GENUINE / LASTING VALUE**

**(The End Result Of Such A Process)**

#### **A. CONTINUING TO ALLOW JESUS TO SET THE AGENDA FOR YOUR HOME**

##### **FAMILY<sup>6</sup>**

Through years of sacrifice and hard work, Tim Burke achieved his life-long dream of becoming a professional baseball player. While a pitcher for the Montreal Expos he and his wife decided to start a family but soon discovered they were unable to have children. After much prayer, Burke and his wife decided to adopt four special-needs international children instead.

Burke soon discovered that his life on the road was not conducive to being a good husband and father. Over time he came to the conclusion that he couldn't do a good job at both. After a great deal of prayer and soul-searching, Burke made what many thought was a foolish decision. He decided to give up professional baseball.

When he left the stadium for the last time, reporters wanted to know why he was retiring. His response is instructive: "Baseball, is going to do just fine without me. It's not going to miss a beat. But I'm the only father my children have. I'm the only husband my wife has. And they need me more than baseball does."

Continuing to allow Jesus to set the agenda for your home – and doing so over the long haul.

#### **THE PROBLEM OF HERE & NOW**

Not only is such an approach to life costly, but there is also the problem of the here and now – in the middle of the daily grind, routine – in the middle of point A & B – when you don't yet see what the finished product is going to look like for some years to come. Peter will raise that issue indirectly when Jesus says to the rich young ruler that he is to divest himself of his material treasures and then follow Him with the promise he will receive treasure in heaven – i.e. there is a future payoff.

#### **PETER'S QUESTION**

After the rich young ruler walks away from Jesus, Peter on behalf of the other disciples ask a penetrating question of Jesus – one that is really not all that out of line. Peter said to him, "*We have left all we had to follow you!*" (Lk. 18:29).

The truth is that they had given up a great deal in order to follow Christ's lead – in order to restructure their lives around Jesus – in order to be obedient to what God was asking – in order to take the initiative, leadership for spiritual matters.

The truth was that in the days ahead following Christ would require even more rearranging of their lives, priorities, etc. – even more sacrifices for Christ and their families.

The truth is that it always has been that way – always will be a cost to passing on an inheritance worth having to others – modeling what a Christian father, mother, grandparent, Sunday school teacher, etc. looks like in human

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<sup>6</sup> Craig Larson, *Choice Contemporary Stories & Illustrations: for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker, 1988; p. 85.

flesh – modeling for them so that they will desire to come to know and grow and go for Christ. Modeling what is of genuine, lasting value is costly. In fact it is not merely difficult, but quite frankly impossible without a humble reliance upon Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **WHAT TO DO IN THE MEANTIME**

What do you do while the paint is still drying? What do you do while the grass is still growing and needs to be mowed week in and week out? What do you do while the kids are still at that in between stage? What do you do when it appears that you might even be losing ground?

Well, you might try what Mark Twain advocated in his day. Twain suggested that when a child becomes what we refer to in our day as middle school age, you should put him or her in a barrel, nail down the lid, and feed them through an opening in the top. And when the child becomes of high school age, he said, you should board up the hole.

A far better approach is this: You continue to be faithful to Christ. You continue to trust, look to Jesus to honor your faithfulness (as imperfect as it may be) to him. You continue bringing your kids, to Christ in prayer. You come to him and ask him to touch them – in his way and time. You pound the door of heaven and ask God to bring y your wayward prodigal to “come to his / her senses”. You keep coming to Jesus, you keep walking by faith in Jesus, and you trust him to honor your faithfulness to Him.

## **B. TRUSTING JESUS TO HONOR YOUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM**

### **JESUS’ PROMISE**

Take the time this afternoon to read what Paul Harvey used to call “the rest of the story” and you will find Jesus’ promise made as an encouragement to Peter and anyone else who is in the middle of the journey with seemingly no end in sight – Jesus’ encouragement to anyone here this morning who is wondering if there is a payoff for modeling faithfulness to Christ before our children.

*“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come, eternal life” (Lk. 18:29-30).*

The truth is, Jesus said, no one who by faith follows me will ever be shortchanged. Yes, there is a cost for modeling so our children can see what God looks like in human flesh. Yes, there is a cost to modeling so our children will want to come by faith to Christ. Yes, there is a cost to faithfulness. But Jesus’ promise is that there is a payoff as well. And the payoff if you will is God will make sure that we have left our kids an inheritance worth having, an spiritual inheritance in heaven, an inheritance “*where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do no break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Mt. 6:19-21). An inheritance, a legacy worth having.

### **MR. HOLLAND’S OPUS: LEAVING A LEGACY<sup>7</sup>**

Mr. Holland’s Opus is a movie about a frustrated composer in Portland, Oregon, who takes a job as a high school band teacher in the 1960s. Holland (Richard Dreyfuss) initially believes the job will be temporary – just

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<sup>7</sup> *Mr. Hollands Opus* (Hollywood Pictures, 1995 – PG); written by Patrick Sheane Duncan, directed by Stephen Herek.

until he can fulfill his lifelong dream of writing a piano concerto – and thus in his mind, leave behind a lasting musical legacy. The temp job eventually lasts 35 years.

Of course during that time, family responsibilities and demands mean his dream of a musical legacy is just that – an unfulfilled dream. Near the end of the movie Mr. Holland learns that he is going to lose his job due to budget cutbacks. Holland returns to his classroom to pick up his belongings a few days after school has let out for the summer. His wife and son give him a hand with the boxes.

As they leave the room and walk down the hallway Mr. Holland hears some noise in the auditorium. He opens the door, and to his amazement the room is packed to capacity with current and former students. His wife, who planned the surprise gathering goes to the podium, thanks everyone for coming, and introduces one of her husband’s former students, the current governor of Oregon.

She tells the crowd of the profound influence her former teacher made in her life. She knows of his life-long unfulfilled dream of a musical legacy, and urges him to look around the room at all the people whose lives he impacted. They are as she says “the melodies and notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life.”

Holland who had moments earlier felt his life had accomplished nothing of great value, now realizes he has left behind a great legacy in the lives of those he has invested in. Not the legacy he had dreamed of – but a legacy of great worth nonetheless.

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **WORD OF CAUTION**

I want to spend our final moments addressing you who are younger. I want to speak directly to you who are the next generation about a certain danger that you need to guard against. Please be careful about comparing, and/or criticizing your parents or other adults around you because they have feet of clay or do not measure up to your expectations.

### **A LESSON LEARNED IN SPADES**

Pastor and author Craig Larson<sup>8</sup> tells a personal story of how he learned that lesson in spades. It happened one summer when he was about nine years old and another family visited their home for a barbecue. At some point in the afternoon the father of the other family began wrestling with his sons in the grass. Larson watched with great envy as the other boys climbed on their dad’s back and held on to his legs as he fought them off like an embattled bear, picking them up and spinning them around like airplanes.

Larson, whose father was busy with something and not in the yard at the time, remembers feeling left out. Worse, he began to think to himself, “My father doesn’t wrestle with me like that.” And as he did he childishly began to think that the other boys had a better father than he did. He sulked off to his room and later tearfully told his mom and dad how he felt.

The truth of course was quite different. Larson writes, “The truth was that my father and I did many great things together. He took me to White Sox, Bears and Bulls games. We played baseball together, and he attended many of my Little League games. He never spoke a critical word to me, but rather affirmed me often. He provided a comfortable suburban life for our family of eight. Nevertheless, at that moment of narrow

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Larson, *Pastoral Grit*; Bethany House Publishers, 1998; p. 93-94.

comparison, I overlooked all his virtues and the good things he did for me and focused on the one thing I wanted at the time. I drank the poison of envy.”

Larson adds this postscript to the story, “Comparisons are deceptively skewed, and in this case, tragically so. Perhaps a year or so after the holiday we shared with this family, the father (of the other boys) I had so admired committed suicide. My father and I continue to be the greatest of friends to this day.

## **FEET OF CLAY**

There are no perfect human fathers or mothers. Even the best of us have feet of clay. Trust me when I tell you that everyone seems normal – till you get to know them. And believe this: All of us – from the youngest among us to the oldest – have the same problem, the same need, and must come to God the same way – by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Jesus and Jesus alone is the only perfect model of a truly godly person.

That is why as you look around for earthly, human models, examples in your family, extended family, or church family – you must always remember that your faith and trust must ultimately be placed only in Jesus.

But let’s say for sake of argument that you have reason to find fault with your parents. Even if you are right – you need to pray for your parents. It is a hard job. One day you will find yourself in their shoes and you will not be so confident, or cocky, judgmental, or sure of your own righteousness.

I remember one Father’s day years ago when I sent my dad a card with a note that said “The more I do this job (i.e. parenting), the more I appreciate what you did.”

## **MOST IMPORTANT**

Perhaps most important is the fact that one day you will stand before God and He will not ask you what you did with the imperfect model, the other adults in the church, or even your parents. God will not ask you what you did with the imitation, but what you did with the genuine article. (e.g. imitation Reebok, Rollex, Koby Bryant shoe)

## **IF YOU ARE HERE AND HAVE NO MODEL AT ALL**

God has provided some models for you in this church family. Men and women who are not perfect, but who are by the grace of God attempting to learn what it means to be a man or woman of God, a Christian mother or father, etc. People you would be wise to get to know and learn from – even at a distance – what it means to be a godly man or godly woman – what it means to walk imperfectly by faith when you don’t understand what God is doing in your life – or when you can’t see where His hand is leading you – when you simply have to trust His heart.

## **PAUL’S AMAZING COMMENT**

“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became you father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:14-15). He went on to say “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

## **FOLLOW OTHERS WHO FOLLOW CHRIST**

Follow those men and women in this congregation who have walked with Christ for some time now. If you are a parent – especially a parent of a teen and understand very well what Jesus meant when he said “He who perseveres to the end shall be saved” (??) – find those in this congregation who have successfully – albeit imperfectly – successfully navigated those waters. If you don’t know where to find such folks, come to Hunt Thru The Bible on Sunday mornings at 10 am and I will introduce you to a few of them. Then follow them in as far as they follow Christ.

And if you still find that you having a hard time finding spiritual fathers and mothers in the faith in whose footsteps you can follow – then you can follow me – in as far as and only as I continue to follow Christ.

May God raise up from within this congregation men and women of faith – parents and grandparents – older saints with grown children – people who by relying upon God’s grace and power are modeling what a man or woman, a father or mother in the faith looks like in human flesh. Imperfect people of faith who through the consistency of their walk with Jesus provide the kinds of models for the little ones in our midst, for our teens, for our young men and women in college, for our younger so that coming to faith in Jesus will be the most natural thing in the world for them. People in this congregation who model what is of genuine value and leave for them an inheritance worth having. Bring on the babies! And may those who come behind us find us faithful.

## **CLOSING SONG: MAY THOSE WHO COME BEHIND US FIND US FAITHFUL<sup>9</sup>**

We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road  
And those who've gone before us line the way  
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary  
Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses  
Let us run the race not only for the prize  
But as those who've gone before us, let us leave to those behind us  
The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives

Chorus:

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone  
And our children sift through all we've left behind  
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover  
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find

Chorus

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<sup>9</sup> John Mohr, *Find Us Faithful*. Jonathan Mark Music; Birdwing Music; 1987.