

August 4/5, 2018

More Serving, Less Complaining

Kids and Youth Weekend

2 Timothy, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Exodus

Pastor Bryan Clark

(Kids Video)

“Hey, down here. Keep going, keep going, keep going. Hi!”

“Hi! Oh, I know you. You’re the grownups. We’re the kids.”

“You’ve probably heard of us.”

“Yeah, you’ve probably heard of us.”

“We’re here on the weekends too just like you.”

“And there’s a lot more of us.”

“You might not know this but while you’re learning about the Bible, we’re learning about the Bible too.”

“The Bible has a lot to say about kids.”

Proverbs 22:6 says, **“Start children off on the way they should go and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”**

“You might have heard that one before.”

In Mark 10 Jesus says, **“People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them, but the disciplines rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was in...in...
“indignant.”**

“indignant.”

“What does indignant mean?”

“It means Jesus was angry or annoyed.”

“Jesus was angry!”

“He was not happy.”

*“Anyway, Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”***

“I guess you could say we’re kind of a big deal.”

“Yeah, we are a big deal!”

“Not only are we the future of the church but we are an important part right now.”

“So, don’t forget about us. Okay?”

“Deal?”

“Deal!” (shaking hands)

About a month ago my oldest daughter Ashley and I were in Germany. I was speaking at a conference center about an hour and a half from Frankfurt, out in kind of a wooded area, a beautiful conference area. When you go down one hall of the conference center, there was a whole series of pictures that gave kind of the story of the history of the conference center. It was very interesting to notice that one of the pictures revealed that at one time the camp had been used as one of Hitler’s youth camps, and it was a reminder that world leaders for thousands of years have understood, “If you are going to change a culture, you don’t argue with the adults; you train the children.” Now historically, this has been used for great evil. It has also been used for great good. But to understand, at the end of the day, you don’t change a culture by arguing with adults; you change it by training children. So here we are in 21st century American culture. There’s a lot to be frustrated

with; there's a lot to discourage us; there's a lot to be fearful of; there's a lot to argue about. But part of what we have to come to grips with is, "None of that changes anything!" You can argue to the day you die; you won't change anything. If we are going to be serious about long-term change in our culture, we do that by investing in our children and youth. My suggestion would be for the church in America: "Way less complaining, far more serving!"

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you are visiting with us, you have probably figured out this is not an ordinary service for us. This is kind of like what I would think of as a family time, and it's a reminder of the need for this core value: to own the importance of investing in our youth and our children! This isn't just for parents. This isn't just for children's workers or youth workers. This is a value that all of us must own together. So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Timothy, Chapter 2. Second Timothy is Paul's final letter. I find it a very emotional letter. He knows he is about to die; he actually states that at the end of the letter. He's run his race; he's finished the course. He's ready to die, and will soon be executed by Nero. So Paul literally will give his life for this movement but now, coming to the end of his race, it's vitally important that this movement continue. How do you take a handful of struggling Christians, and how does that small group of Christians change the world? Well, Paul gives us hints of that in 2 Timothy. So, for example verse 1 of chapter 2:

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (* NASB, 2 Timothy 2:1-2)

As you read through, you find that this is a consistent pattern for Paul—that one generation pours into the next generation, that they might pour into the next generation. Whether those are age-generations or just believer-generations, there is this perpetuating of the kingdom as one generation pours into the next. If you read a little bit farther, what he says is that in order to accomplish this, you have to have the *focus* of a *soldier*, the *discipline* of an *athlete*, the *work ethic* of a *farmer*, which gives us a clear understanding, "This is not easy!" Flip then to Chapter 3. The discussion is about the fact that the world's going to be very confusing. There's going to be a lot of conflict; there's going to be a lot of persecution. This isn't an easy assignment. So, how do you live skillfully in a culture like that? We pick it up in verse 12.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad to worse*, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:12-17)

It would be very easy to just kind of read over what Paul said without really understanding what he just said. This is a thousands-year-old tradition. Actually, it's more than tradition. It was God's strategy for perpetuating His kingdom. Paul says to Timothy, "*You have to hang on to what you have understood and believed, that which you have been taught from childhood, that will be your foundation—the sacred Scriptures—to give you what you need to live skillfully, to flourish in a culture that's going to be exceedingly complex.*" We find out that the curriculum is the Scripture, and it's this teaching from childhood that equips us, lays this foundation to live well.

So this is what I want to talk about. When you go through the Scriptures, it's not like you can find just one passage that clearly lays it out. It's much more of a theme that runs through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. So we are going to throw some Scriptures on the screen, skip around a little bit; that will make it quicker and a little bit more convenient.

But in order to start this conversation, I want to start by asking a question. What is the purpose of the family? I would suggest if that doesn't just automatically roll out of your head, you don't know. It's been very interesting over the years that we as evangelical churches talk a lot about the family; we talk a lot about the importance of the family. There have been hundreds, maybe thousands of books written about the family. But when I ask Christians the question, "What's the purpose of the family?" typically all I get is a blank stare. How could we possibly be successful and measure success if we have no idea what the purpose is?

Can you imagine running a business that way? "What's the purpose of the business?" "I don't know. We just show up and do things." That's probably not going to work. Some would say, "Well, I think it's just to have healthy, happy, safe kids." Well, that sounds good. Let's run a business that way. "What do you do?" "Oh, we just have happy, safe, prosperous employees." But what are we doing? What is the purpose? Now stop and think about it. If the purpose is just to have safe, happy children, doesn't that sound rather selfish? Really, is that it? Doesn't that just fit with a culture that is selfish and self-centered—and it's all about me? Certainly God has something more in mind. Sometimes I talk to people and they say, "Well, right now my family is my ministry." Well, good! My family is my ministry too, but it isn't my only ministry. How selfish would that be to think that the only purpose for my time and talents and treasures is to pour into me and to us and our family. Certainly God intended something more! As a matter of fact, I would suggest to you, "That isn't good for your children!"

Now stop and think about this. The Millennials and the generations that have come after them—there has been all this research done. There have been all these books that talk about the "Me Generation" and the selfishness and the self-centeredness and the narcissism and all of that. Those reports are endless. But what's interesting is the parents of those generations seem to be clueless as to how this happened. How is it possible we fail to realize that we created an environment where our children were the center of the universe? "Everything is about you; you are the most important person in the world," and then they grow into adulthood and they act like that and as parents we say, "We don't know what happened. Where did they get that?" I know where they got that. "You taught them that!" You have to realize: if your mindset is that my family is my only ministry, you are going to raise selfish, self-centered, narcissistic kids. Part of parenting is to create a sense of mission—that we are here on purpose for a purpose—that there is something bigger than ourselves that we are coming together to accomplish. I would suggest to you the biblical purpose for the family is to perpetuate the kingdom from generation to generation.

Now in messages in the past, I've made my case for that. I don't have time to do that this morning, but it's an easy case to make. In simple everyday language, "The purpose of the family is to pass God on from generation to generation." This is not a manmade strategy. When you read through the Old Testament, what you see is: this is God's strategy! Again and again and again, God said, "This is what I want you to do to build and perpetuate my kingdom!" Some of the more familiar passages we will go through them and you can see them on the screen. One is in Deuteronomy 6, probably the most familiar. The context of Deuteronomy 6 is the nation is about to enter into the land of promise and God is telling them, "This is what you must do to flourish in the land."

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons [or to your children] and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6: 5-9)

He is not talking about fifteen minutes a day of family devotions. He is talking about parents that get it, understand it, believe it, and live it, and then it shows up in every area of life—teaching their children in this laboratory that we call a family what it means to follow God. It goes on in Deuteronomy 6:

“When your son [or your child] asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the LORD our God commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.’ So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us. (Vs. 20-25)

You can’t miss it there—that when the nation goes into the land of promise, the danger is in forgetting what God has done. So it’s the responsibility of one generation to pass on to the next generation: “This is God. This is who He is. This is what He has done for us. This is why we follow Him,” perpetuating the kingdom from generation to generation.

So now let’s stop and think about this for a moment. Let’s frame this around a decade. So, let’s imagine a 15-year-old today. In a decade that 15-year-old will be 25. So let’s imagine ten years from now. What will that 25-year-old need most to flourish in life? Hmmmm. “I think probably to be really good at soccer.” No, I don’t think so. “I think probably to be really good at softball.” No, probably not. “I think probably to get straight A’s in high school.” No, probably not. “I think probably to be really good in music, to be really good in dance, to be really popular in school.” No, I don’t think. I think ten years from now what will matter most is that that 25-year-old has a clear foundation of truth to believe and understands the sacred writings in order to navigate and flourish in a very dangerous and complicated culture. I guarantee you if in ten years that 15-year-old is in bondage, is broken-hearted, is in despair, is feeling hopelessness, none of those other things will matter at all! If that’s true, then what needs to be most important now in order to get there? Stop and think about all the things that we make time for that in ten years will really not matter much, and a lot of the things that matter most, for some reason, we don’t have time for. That is a huge strategic error that will have a great price tag!

Again in the Scriptures, Psalm 78 has this same theme. It’s important to remind ourselves this isn’t a manmade strategy. This is what God keeps saying is the way to perpetuate the kingdom.

**Listen, O my people, to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.**

**For He established a testimony in Jacob
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,
That the generation to come might know, *even* the children *yet* to be born,
That they may arise and tell *them* to their children,
That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments,
And not be like their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Psalm 78:1-8)**

You just can't miss it there. It was the responsibility of the nation, not just the parents. Everybody owned the value together. Israel understood to perpetuate the kingdom it must be taught generation to generation to generation. We saw this in Proverbs. Chapter 1, verse 4:

**To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion, Verse 8:**

**Hear, my son, your father's instruction
And do not forsake your mother's teaching;**

Now we can go on all morning doing this; it's a very consistent theme. Again, this is God saying, "This is how you do it."

The Hebrew educational model was different than our Western model. Our Western model is taken primarily from the Greeks, and it's oriented around the ability to regurgitate content. In other words: if you can regurgitate it back on a test, you know it. But the Hebrew model was: if you don't live it, you don't know it. They had virtually no category for head knowledge, so it was up to the adults to understand it and to live it, to live it in front of the next generation, and to pass it on. It was primarily about morality. It was about truth. It was about character. It was about integrity. There was an understanding that this is the foundation upon which all other education is built. The primary teacher was God; next was the family. There's so much in the Old Testament about the importance of families teaching this to their children, but it was also the responsibility of what we would call the professionals—the priests, the scribes, the prophets—to teach the nation to teach their children. It was even the responsibility of the kings. Think about how much time David and Solomon, for example, spent teaching. It was just understood: that's the job of a king because if we don't get the

next generation on board, we are in so much trouble as a nation! It was done with so much creativity. It was about the temple, about the tabernacle, about the sacrificial system. It was about the feasts and the festivals. One of the most common would be Passover. Exodus 12 says this about the Passover. Notice again, the same emphasis:

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshiped. (Exodus 12:23-27)

The whole point of Passover was in order for the children to say, “Why do we do this?” It was a time to recite God’s faithfulness and God’s goodness. Think about in the Old Testament how many memorials, how many Ebenezer’s, how many markers they were commanded to put in place. If you go back and read those texts, they all say the same thing—so that the children in the generations to come, when they see that marker will say, “What is that?” and it’s a chance for the adults to rehearse, “This is a memorial to the faithfulness of God and why we obey Him.” It was just part of the culture. So you see when Paul is saying to Timothy, “*You have known the sacred writings since childhood,*” it was just part of the Hebrew culture.

The nation of Israel was what we would refer to as a theocracy. God was their king. Human kings and leaders reigned under the authority of God. God at the center defined everything. It was at the center of their military, their government, their social and welfare programs, Of course it was the center of their religion. It was the center of everything—even the center of their geography. And yet with all of that, the pattern of the Hebrew people again and again and again was to drift away from God, and the consequences were always catastrophic. If you go back and read those texts, the most common refrains are that one generation got careless, and the next generation forgot God. As a result of that, thousands and thousands of people died as a result of the catastrophic consequences of a nation forgetting their God. The nation Israel understood collectively, “We are in this together and if we don’t get this done and pass the kingdom on to the next generation, we will all pay the price.”

Now, if the nation of Israel so drifted as a theocracy, what about us today? We are not a theocracy; we are not supposed to be. That’s not what God wants, but we understand that all these different entities often offer competing voices—not supporting voices—to the mission God has called us to. So, we have a very difficult assignment! It’s not the job of the government. It’s not the job of the schools. It’s the job of the church to perpetuate the kingdom from generation to generation, not just the parents, not just the grandparents. It’s a value we all have to own together in order to pass the kingdom on from generation to generation. We must have the *focus* of a *soldier*, the *discipline* of an *athlete*, the *work ethic* of a *farmer* if we are going to get the job done.

Now, this is for you whether you are single or married. This is for you whether you are old or young. This is a value we all own together. I would like to appeal specifically to my peers, my generation—the empty nesters—especially those in your 60’s and 70’s. You have more to offer today than you’ve probably ever had—so much life experience, so much wisdom. So let me ask you a question. “Why are you standing on the sideline and watching everyone else do the work?” What

are we doing? At a time when we have the most to offer, we are just going to sit it out? We are just going to watch everyone else do all the work? Why would we do that? So much research today shows that people in churches in their 60's and 70's feel like the church has forgotten them, that the church has passed them by, that the church doesn't care anymore, and yet again and again and again we invite my generation to pour your life into things that will ultimately matter. I just want to be super clear that if you feel like there's no place for you, like you don't belong, like you're not valued, that's *your* choice. That's not *our* choice. Again and again and again we have invited you to be part of something special that will matter forever! If you choose to sit it out, that's your choice, but that's not what we want. We want you involved because you have so much to offer.

Now this can be directly or indirectly. Indirectly has this idea of kind of the whole picture. So, for example, some of you give so generously to make it possible to have facilities and staff and resources and salaries; that's an amazing contribution to what we're trying to be, what we are trying to do. Some of you mow the grass; you remove the snow; you set up and clean the building and tear down and change the rooms. We have to have that. That's critical! That's a significant part of making it happen. Those who will have the most influence on the children are their parents, so we offer a long list of ministries to adults in order to pour into children's parents, in order that those parents can pour into their children. So, indirectly, one of the best things we can do for the children is to pour into their parents. There are a lot of ministries and a lot of people involved in that.

Directly would be directly involved in children's ministry or youth ministry. Some of you are saying, "I just don't think I could teach children." I understand that. Most people can't, but there are so many other things you can do. Can you love a child? Can you care about a child? Can you encourage a teenager? There are lots of ways you can get involved that will fit your personality, that will fit your schedule.

One of the most common responses when people are invited to serve is the classic, "Well, I'm just too busy." You know how much I love that answer. (*laughter*) It is the 21st century copout for everything you don't want to do. I'm just so weary of hearing it. When people say, "I am too busy," the first thing I want to say is, "Are you bragging or are you complaining?" because our culture's kind of made a virtue out of busyness. When you say, "I'm too busy," here's what you are really saying, "Well, I'm really too busy because I'm too significant; I'm too valuable; I'm too important. I want you to be impressed; that's why I just told you that." If you don't think that's true, the next time someone says to you, "I'm too busy," say this to them: "I'm so sorry that your life has become so out-of-control and you lack the personal discipline to live a healthy rhythm." (*laughter*) See if they get defensive. They did not want a lecture. They wanted you to be impressed!

I get very defensive for all the people at Berean who serve so faithfully. We have an awesome service culture—amazing people! But when you say, "I can't because I'm too busy," what you are implying is that those people aren't. "It's really nice that those people have nothing else to do, that those people were bored. Those people aren't significant and busy like me, so it's nice for them." The people that serve at Lincoln Berean, these are busy people with busy lives. They are just as busy as you are. They've just made a value judgment on what matters, and they've made a decision to sacrifice time and energy to invest into the things that will matter forever. Honestly, everybody in the room has time for what you think is important.

Here in just a few weeks, suddenly, miraculously, people who this morning would say, "I'm too busy," will miraculously find time every weekend to take in a Husker game. (*laughter*) Whether you're at the stadium or whether you are watching it on TV, it's a half-day commitment and

miraculously, suddenly there is time in your schedule. Everybody has time. It's just a matter of what you think is important.

Look at these beautiful children this morning, these awesome teenagers. Before you leave this morning, stand eyeball to eyeball with one of these teenagers or one of these children and say, "I know that when you are twenty-five, you are going to be heartbroken...you are going to be in despair. You are going to be addicted; you are going to be in bondage. Your life is going to be miserable, and I just want you to know today that I don't care." There isn't a single person in this room that would say that. You do care; I know you care. I know this congregation. It is full of people who care but sometimes we get caught up in the busyness and values of the culture, and we lose sight of what really matters. Our desire is to raise up an army of people who would pour into the lives of these children and youth. My dream is that ten years from now people in our community would not say, "That Lincoln Berean is full of a bunch of complainers, a bunch of arguers, a bunch of rightwing extremists." They would say, "That is a church that loves and values their children and youth, and they are changing this community by raising up an army of world changers!"

One more thing before we end. It's really important to me that you understand clearly, I'm not asking you to do God a favor. If you think that, you have it exactly backwards. I'm telling you that God has extended to you an unimaginable opportunity. Imagine this arc that goes through the auditorium and keeps going and that is eternity. Then down here there is the timeline of human history, and we are going to take a razor blade and we're going to make just a little slash, and that represents the duration of your life. It's such a thin little slash you can't really distinguish if it is fifty years, sixty years, eighty years, or ninety years? You can't really tell it's so thin. But what's in the content of that tiny little slash? God has invited you, given you the opportunity to connect with something that will still matter ten thousand years from now. That is a remarkable opportunity—an invitation to be part of something that will matter forever! I'm asking you: Please, don't just brush this aside with, "Bryan was on a tirade this morning! Have a nice day." But can we own this vision together and understand that over the last one hundred years the evangelical church in America has lost significant ground! We have not taken this seriously. We have diminished. We are far from a Christian nation. Can we ramp up? Can we recapture? Can we together understand the importance of this to perpetuate the kingdom from generation to generation...to know that you have been part of something that will matter forever? Let's do this together: Less complaining, less arguing, more serving!

Our Father, we are so thankful for the invitation, the opportunity to invest ourselves in something that will matter forever. God, we have amazing people here this morning that sacrifice time and talent and treasure to accomplish Your mission. God, we are so thankful for them, but there are also amazing people with so much to offer who right now are standing on the sidelines, letting everybody else do the work. God, move and motivate them this morning to invest in that which will last forever, for Your glory! In Jesus' name, Amen.

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