

When Your Children Ask

by David Roper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of teaching children about spiritual truths and the significance of making Christ Lord in our life.

Duration: 42:15

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:6-8, Joshua 4:1-9, Joshua 4:15-24, Ephesians 4:22-24

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Teaching Children"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the Lord is always doing highly improbable and unique things in our lives. He encourages listeners to trust in the Lord's ability to exceed their expectations and solve their problems. The sermon also discusses the conquest of the Promised Land by the Israelites, highlighting the significance of chapters 3 and 4 in the book of Joshua. The speaker also addresses the importance of teaching children about God and suggests incorporating creative arts and crafts to engage them in learning.

Transcript

You know, children have a lot of endearing qualities about them, but perhaps the one that is most engaging is their tendency to ask questions which no one can answer. As a matter of fact, I'm not even sure there are any answers. I have a lot of answers, but somehow my answers never seem to coincide with my children's questions, like how high is up and how far is there.

A couple of weeks ago Joshua asked me why it's Friday. I heard a story, perhaps you've heard of it, a little boy who asked his father, Father, how tall is the Eiffel Tower? And his dad said, I don't know, son, I don't have any idea. And he said, how far is it from here to China? And his dad said, I don't know, son.

And he said, well, how deep is the deepest part of the ocean? And his father said, I really don't have any idea. And the little boy said, Daddy, how, oh, never mind. And his dad said, oh, that's all right, son, ask questions.

That's the only way you can get answers. And we all, we recognize about children that particular faculty, they are naturally inquisitive and it's the way they learn. Someone asked Isabel Robbie, the well-known Nobel Prize winning scientist, what he attributed his inquiring spirit to.

And his response was that each day when he came home from school, his mother would ask him, Isabel, did you ask any good questions today? And I'm convinced that the natural inquisitive spirit that children have is designed by God to lead them into a knowledge of the truth. And we as parents have an opportunity to be in the primary spot in that process. That's at least the point of view that Scripture takes, and I'd like to point you to a passage of Scripture that I think underlines that principle.

Turn with me to Joshua, the fourth chapter. We're going to set aside our study in Zechariah for a while because there are some more important factors to be considered this month. And we'll be looking at the book of Joshua together, and then sometime this fall we'll return to our study in Zechariah.

Joshua is the sixth book in the Old Testament. If you're new to the Scriptures, the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy are the books of Moses. And then follows Joshua.

This is a book, as most of you know, that's concerned with the conquest of Canaan. The small group of Israelites that came out of Egypt in one generation dispossessed the entire population of Palestine. We're so used to reading the account in Joshua and having it told to us as children that we sometimes miss the import of that achievement.

It's something that's absolutely unparalleled in history. There's never been anything like it. They know from the literature of this time that for a thousand years or more before the Israelites conquered Palestine, there were diagonals of Canaanite city-states that were absolutely impregnable.

It stood against all the powers of the ancient Near East. And yet when Joshua and his group of ex-slaves invaded the land in one generation, they displaced almost the entire population. That's something unique.

It's never happened before in history and hasn't happened since. It's so extraordinary that most modern liberal Old Testament historians have taken the approach that the book of Joshua is untrustworthy and they have developed very radical reinterpretations of Israelite history in order to explain that conquest. It's unparalleled.

It couldn't have occurred. But those of us that know the Lord know He's always doing highly improbable things. Things that He's never done before and things that He'll never do again.

And if you're facing a week where you have some difficult decisions to make or you're facing something you've never faced before and you're casting about for a way of solving a problem or meeting that particular situation, remember that the Lord is always doing things that exceed our expectations, that are absolutely unparalleled in our experience or anyone else's experience. And if we let our lives be styled by that outlook on the Lord's ability, He'll do totally unique things in our lives, just as He did in the history of Israel. In a very brief period of time, 20 to 25 years, this group of motley slaves drove out a very powerful, deeply entrenched people.

And the book of Joshua is the story of that conquest. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the event that is most significant in the conquest. And it's not the actual campaign, as we might expect.

It's the entrance into Canaan across the River Jordan. There are two events in the history of Israel that the prophets refer to time and time again as the most significant events in the history of Israel. The first is the deliverance from Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea with Moses.

And that's when they became a nation. From a group of slaves, they became a people. The New Testament says they were baptized into Moses.

They were identified with Moses. They became a nation at that point in their history. The second most important event was the journey, as one of the prophets describes it, from Shittim to Gilgal, this little six-mile journey from the east bank of the Jordan River to the west bank.

And that was significant because it was in that action that they received the land. From that point on, they were fighting a battle that was already won. By an act of the will, they crossed Jordan.

And by that act, Canaan was theirs, though there were still battles to be fought. And the campaign had to be carried out. And there were very difficult things that transpired.

But the land was theirs. God told Joshua, every spot of ground that your foot rests upon, it's yours. And it was theirs by right of inheritance.

And they entered into it by stepping across Jordan. Now, as is always the case in the Old Testament, when the prophets or the writers of Scripture speak to Israel, they always speak over their shoulder to us. These are truths that have application to us as well.

We, like Israel, are involved in the journey, although ours is not geographical. We're not going from Egypt to the wilderness to Canaan. Ours is spiritual.

The deliverance from Egypt is a picture in our life of our salvation. That's what salvation entails. We're taken out of the grasp of the world.

Paul says we are transferred or transplanted from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. So the dominion of the world and the flesh is broken. And we're set free.

We're no longer slaves. That's a picture of our salvation, of our redemption, when we ask Christ to come into our life. It's evidently the purpose of God that each one of us spend some time in the wilderness because that's where we learn to do things on a different basis.

Most of us transfer out of the world the world's way of doing things. And for a long period of time, we try to sustain our spiritual life on the same basis that we sustained ourselves as non-Christians by doing it ourselves, by counting on our own resources. And there needs to be some time in the wilderness, as there was some time allotted for Israel, in order to learn that God does things on an entirely different basis.

But it's not His intention that we stay there for 40 years as the Israelites wandered for 40 years. There were at least two Israelites, Caleb and Joshua, who came out of Egypt determined to make the Lord Lord in every area of their life. And they could have gone immediately into the land or with a very brief delay of perhaps a year or two years.

But the bulk of the people wandered for a time and there was a subsequent decision that they made to enter the land. And with most of us, that's our experience. And the entry into the land across Jordan is a symbol of the decision that we make to make Christ Lord in our life.

Now, some of you may have made that decision when you came out of Egypt. But others may not have. You may not have understood when you invited Christ to come into your life that He intended to come in as Lord.

And so there was another decision downstream that enabled you to enter into the fullness of rest in Christ. Now, you only have that rest when Christ is Lord. Or as someone has said it, we only have the abounding life when we've abandoned ourselves to God.

As long as we keep strings attached, we can't really enjoy our life in Christ. The problem with a lot of us is that we're just Christian enough to be miserable. And not Christian enough to really enjoy our relationship to the Lord.

We're like the people of Israel in the wilderness. There's bitterness and we're rebelling against authority and we still have our idols with us. And there are all sorts of things from the old life that we brought over with us and we're still clinging to them.

And it takes time before we learn how miserable the wilderness is. And the only way to have any freedom whatever in our Christian experience is to take our hands off of all these things and say, Lord, I want You to run my life. And that's when we begin to enjoy things.

There are still battles. There are still problems. Things still are difficult at times.

But that's when the Christian life becomes a joy instead of a trial. That's what the Israelites experienced once they got into the promised land. It was a place of rest, though there were battles there.

They could enjoy the fruit of the land and fully understand what it meant to be God's people. And that's why this event is so significant in the history of Israel. It's when they entered into rest.

All right, let's look at chapter 4. Chapter 3, just in the paragraph immediately preceding, describes the actual crossing of the river. The Lord instructed Joshua to send the ark first. The ark, which was a symbol of God's presence in His people, was sent into the Jordan.

The passage indicates that the Jordan was at flood tide. It was the time of harvest. And the Jordan was overflowing its banks.

It was a very formidable barrier. I'm sure in your own experience you discovered that when you determined to enter the land, when you were through walking in the wilderness and you were ready to let Christ rule in your life, there were so many obstacles to that decision it seemed the worst possible time to fling your life away. That seemed like the time to preserve it.

And this is what the Israelites were confronted with. It was the Jordan rushing by and yet they were told to move into the flow and the Levites lifted the ark on their shoulders and they stepped off into the river and the passage describes the river Jordan rolling back as far as Adam. A little city just to the north of the Dead Sea and they were able to walk across the Jordan on dry ground.

In chapter 4, verse 1, the account continues and I'd like to read the first nine verses of this chapter and then verses 15 through the end just to give you the events in sequence. Now it came about when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan that the Lord spoke to Joshua saying, Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe. And command them saying, Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan from the place where the priest's feet are standing firm and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.

So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe and Joshua said to them, Cross again to the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. Let this be a sign among you so that when your children ask later saying what do these stones mean to you then you shall say to them because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord when it crossed the Jordan. The waters of the Jordan were cut off.

So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever. And thus the sons of Israel did as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan just as the Lord spoke to Joshua according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And they carried them over with them to the lodging place and put them down there.

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing and they are there to this day. Now verse 15 Now the Lord said to Joshua Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan. So Joshua commanded the priests saying Come up from the Jordan.

And it came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come up from the middle of the Jordan and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and went over all its banks as before. Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan Joshua set up at Gilgal.

And he said to the sons of Israel When your children ask their fathers in time to come saying, What are these stones? Then you shall inform your children saying Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground. Now it's not easy to understand precisely what occurred unless you read through this chapter a number of times. But it appears that there were two cairns two monuments that were erected out of stones taken from the middle of the Jordan.

There was one pile of stones in the very center of the Jordan where the priests had carried the ark. And then there was another monument that was erected on the west bank at Gilgal. So there were actually two monuments.

And when the priests stepped up out of the water then the Jordan flowed again as before and covered the monument in the middle of Jordan except perhaps for the very tip of it. The impression you get is that these stones were quite large they were actually carried out on their back rather than their shoulders so they could have been quite large and the monument would be large enough to be observed at least just the tip of it from the west bank. And they were told that these monuments would provide opportunities for instruction.

The children would ask, what mean these stones? As children will always ask. And it would become an opportunity for an explanation of this great truth. Now we've already said that this event is the most important event or one of the most important events in the history of Israel.

For them of course it signified the cutting off of their paths. They made the decision to step into the land and all the old life was cut off from them. In fact, I'm convinced that the name Hebrew comes from this event.

Seven times in the book it says they crossed over. The Hebrew word, Hebrew verb that's used there is the term from which the word Hebrew comes from. They knew themselves to be people who had crossed over.

They'd left something behind. And it's interesting that throughout the Old Testament that the term is put in the mouths of neighboring people, Gentile nations in a derogatory sense. Those are the Hebrews, the people that passed over.

Just as the early Christians were called Christians in a derogatory sense in Antioch. Those associated with Christ. It was something that cut them off from the old world as Paul describes our life as being crucified to the world.

The world is crucified to me. It's cut off. And that's what happened to Israel.

They were cut off from all the other people. They were a new nation, a new entity. They had a new law.

They had a new way of doing things. It was totally different, totally disassociated from the people around them. And that's what this event meant in their experience.

I believe in our experience, this event is the counterpart of the truth that we have in Romans 6. Romans 6 describes our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Paul says we have been baptized into Christ. The term means to be identified, to be placed into Christ.

What Christ went through in His death, burial, and resurrection, we go through. He not only died for our sins, Paul says, we died with Him. We were identified with Him.

And just as the ark passed through the nation, through the Jordan, a symbol of the Lord in the midst of His people, so the Lord went first through a death and a burial and a resurrection. And now, as Paul says in Romans 6, death no longer has any claim over Him. Death can't touch Him.

Sin can't touch Him. Dead men don't sin. All the debts accrued in the past are gone.

The old life has no power, no influence. He's free. He's a new man, you see.

Though He never sinned, He assumed our sins. And in His death, He was separated from all of those. And Paul says we were placed into Christ.

Now, that's something we can't understand rationally. That's only something that the Spirit of God can make real to us. But it's true.

Just as the twelve men crossed with the ark, the twelve men of Israel crossed with the ark, and so were identified in the passage through the Jordan. So we, with Christ, passed through death, burial, and resurrection. And the old life has been cut off.

Paul puts it so beautifully this way. He says if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creature. Old things are passed away.

Behold, all things have become new. Or in the terms here of our banner, we have died, but we have become alive in Christ. Paul says we are crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, we live. Yet, we're not the ones who live. It's Christ living in us.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, Paul says, I live by faith. And the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. And that's the great central fact of the Bible.

We've been identified with Christ. We've died with Him. We've been buried with Him.

We've been raised to newness of life. And that we are to know. And that we are to act upon.

And when we identify ourselves by an act of the will with Jesus Christ in that death, burial, and resurrection, then we begin to experience real life. We have a new quality of life. A resurrection kind of life.

Now that's the most fundamental, basic fact of Christian experience. Just as in the life of Israel, that was the most foundational fact. They had committed themselves to cross Jordan when the river flowed back.

They were cut off from the life that they had formerly participated in. They couldn't go back. It was all over.

They were new creatures. Now, Paul says we're to enjoy that. We're to experience it.

But there's something more. We're to teach that to our children. We're to teach it out of our own experience.

And we're to teach it verbally. By words. I'm sure not too long after this event, some little child walking beside the river Jordan saw that pile of stones out in the middle of the river.

And he said to his father, Father, how in the world did those stones get out there? And his dad said, Sit down, son. Let me tell you. And he began to tell his own experience of passing through the Jordan on dry land and discovering the newness of life in the land.

He was talking right out of his experience. Now this, you see, the Scriptures call us back to time and time again. As parents, we're not only responsible to act upon the truth, but we have a responsibility to instruct our children.

That's both a responsibility and a privilege. The passage that Mark read earlier in Proverbs underscores that thought that fathers and mothers have the primary responsibility in the home to instruct their sons and daughters. That's where they get their wisdom.

That's how they're taught. And that principle throughout Scripture is stated again and again and again. And we'll see through the book of Joshua over the next few weeks, there were a number of these memorials that were erected throughout the land which children would notice and comment on and would become an occasion for further teaching.

Now, I want you to turn back a few chapters to Deuteronomy. One book and a few chapters. To Deuteronomy 6. Because the same principle is stated here in slightly different terms.

Chapter 6, verse 4. This is the bedrock statement of Jewish faith and the basis of all their understanding of the nature of God. Verse 4, Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. That's where you begin, as parents. That's where we all begin.

By loving the Lord with all your heart and taking the Word itself to heart. These commandments that I give you this day shall be upon your heart. We're to respond in obedience to the truth.

Now, none of us ever acts perfectly, but that's our heart's intention. To respond in obedience. But then there is a second responsibility.

Verse 7, And you shall teach them literally incisively, sharply, incisively, that is to the point, to your sons 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. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

It's a typical characteristic of the Old Testament to express things in symbolic ways. And the reference here to writing truth on your forehead and on the doors of your house were never intended to be taken merely literally. They also had a symbolic value.

The Lord here was referring to the attitudes and the actions of individuals within the house. How we go about solving our problems is do we act out of the realization that our old life has been crucified with Christ. And we have a new life.

We have a new Lord, a new way of doing things. Is that the intention of our heart and our attitude? And do our actions reflect that? And then the next step is to instruct your children both in a formal way and informally. When you sit down in perhaps some a bit more structured situation, and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and as you work and as you play together and you're involved in various activities as a family, you instruct your children by your attitudes, by the attitude of your heart, by your actions, and by your words.

And over and over again. The Scriptures keep coming back to that responsibility as parents. We, that's never rescinded anywhere in the Scriptures.

The primary responsibility for the instruction of our children rests on the parents. Now, I want to take a few minutes to describe for you something that's on our heart. And then I want to give you a chance, an opportunity to ask questions.

Okay? So, if you want to take one of the cards out of the pew and make notes, you can. And hold your questions, because we want to give you an opportunity to respond a bit. We want to take seriously this injunction as parents to teach our children.

I do as a parent, and I know you do. And all of us feel our weakness in this area. I don't think any of us particularly hit the long ball at this point.

But we want to. We want to. The world has taken so much away from us as parents.

When I was a kid, my dad taught me to drive by putting me in a 1934 Chevy and aiming me down a country road and running for his life. And now, you see, the schools do this. They do it well, but we don't do it.

My son Randy went down to get a hunting license some time ago, and they wouldn't let him have a hunting license until he had an NRA certificate, which meant he had to go someplace and get training in how to use a rifle safely before they would give him the hunting license. There's a reason for it because

parents, fathers no longer teach their sons this sort of thing. Someone else does.

Someone else teaches our children to swim. All the things that normally were done by fathers and sons have been taken over by other agencies. And they're doing well, but that's not the way God set it up.

And we feel that in many ways we've done that in the church. We've taken the world's philosophy right into our thinking about children, and that's the way we train our children. We ship them off to someone else to train them.

And by God's grace, we'd like to reverse that trend. We have, over the past two or three years as a board of elders, perhaps spent more time on the subject of our children than any other topic. We've discussed our Sunday school and the operation of our Sunday school and ministry to our children at great length.

And yet, we're aware of the fact that our Sunday school is not in good shape. There are a lot of very faithful teachers back there who've been laboring faithfully for years who are frustrated, many of them ready to quit. We can't blame you.

And it seems that nothing we've been able to do has paid off, at least along the lines that we would like to see. Because we're really serious about getting truth to our children. We love these kids, as all of you do as parents, and we want to get the truth to them.

And we've come to the conclusion that the Lord is saying something to us and we want to make some changes. And we haven't been this way before, okay? And we're not sure where we're going. When we get there, we'll tell you where we've been, alright? But at this point, we're not sure.

But we know two things that God has indicated to us and as a board of elders, we have voted unanimously to move in this direction. Number one, we're going to do something about our Sunday school. We're going to change it.

Starting July, the last Sunday in July, I believe it was the 27th, there will be a very brief teaching time, 15 to 20 minutes maximum. And then these children will be taken to a gym or to a park. And we're going to play games with them and sing with them and expose them to young men and women who have the real thing.

But the emphasis will be on a good time rather than teaching. Now, if that shocks you as a parent, I'm sure you're entitled to being shocked. But our feeling is that perhaps as nothing else that will bear home to all of us, that we have the responsibility for our children, not the church.

You know, Jesus did not say I will build my Sunday school. You won't find that anywhere in the New Testament. And I realized when he said we will build my church, that includes the Sunday school.

But the Sunday school is an operation. It's a Johnny-come-lately. The Sunday school began in the last century through the ministry of a man named Robert Rakes in London who was concerned about the little street waifs who had no one telling them the good news about Jesus.

And so he started a Sunday school because they went to school on the other days as an evangelistic arm. It was never intended to teach children. It was for Christian children.

He wanted to gather these little street urchins in and tell them about the love of God. And we've incorporated it in the church and now we use that to train our children. And we don't feel it's right.

Now, there will be some teaching because we realize that there are some children who come from non-Christian homes. By the way, we did a survey and there are only about 6% of our Sunday school that come from non-Christian homes. These children will have an opportunity to hear a bit of teaching and they'll be exposed to fine young Christian men and women.

And there will be many opportunities for them to see and hear the Gospel. The second step is to equip you or begin to equip you and me as parents to teach our children. And beginning next Sunday, we're going to publish with each message a list of questions and helps that you can use in your own home to teach your children.

Through the month of July, I'm going to preach on through Joshua and I'm going to take this little statement. Until this day, there were a number of monuments all over Israel, names of places and other things that were intended to catch the attention of children. The next one is a little place called Gilgal.

Right where the nation of Israel arrived on the West Bank, they established a command post that they called Gilgal. And the closest English equivalent we have to that term today is Roly-Poly. And I'm sure any child walking by that spot would say, why did they name that town Roly-Poly? I was raised in Texas and there was a mule shoe Texas out in West Texas and every kid in the world wondered how in the world that city came to have that name.

Well, it's that sort of thing. And there are a number of these all through the book of Joshua located all over Palestine and we're going to go through these and you can, with your children, take them on a journey through Palestine and begin to teach them about some of these monuments. And we'll give you the materials and the pastoral staff and the elders, Waltwick Houston, intern staff, everyone's going to be available to help you with this responsibility and privilege that you have as parents in your home.

Now, having said all that, I'd like to give you a chance to respond. And we have a roving mic someplace. And we'll give you a chance to ask questions and try to answer as best we can.

Yeah, Terry, there's someone right here. Where was it? Right here. Right on the aisle.

Good morning, sir. Morning. I'm not a parent myself, but I'm only about 20 years old and I went through childhood, Sunday school, and things like that very recently.

I originally came from a Lutheran church where the Sunday school and related things were just that. Emphasis on a good time. And the result was pretty catastrophic.

It was very, very dead. And that is why I came here from there. Even after I accepted Christ, I looked at the youth groups I was getting older by then, the equivalent of Sunday school.

It just wasn't worth it. I can't agree with what you're doing here of putting an emphasis on a good time. Certainly the Lord says that we should have a lot of joy in our lives and have a lot of recreation.

But just to go here to a gym or a park, well, you can have the YMCA for that. I hope I don't offend anybody. I appreciate your comment and your honesty.

If all we were doing is providing a good time for these kids, then we wouldn't be remiss. But there are two things that we think will make this very, very profitable for our kids. Number one, they will be exposed to young men and women and older men and women who are genuine in their relationship to the Lord.

And there's so much to be gained just through association with people who are real. They'll have that advantage. There will be some teaching.

There will be 15 to 20 minutes of teaching. So it won't be just recreation. Okay? The other thing which is most important is if that's all we did, we wouldn't be doing the job.

But we want to get the responsibility back into the hands of the parents because that's where it belongs. See? And that we just can't get away from. The Scriptures are too pointed.

They just keep facing us with that. Ephesians 6 says, Children, obey your parents and the Lord. And the very next verse down says, Fathers, raise your children in the nurture and admonition and instruction of the Lord.

See, it's my responsibility as a father to teach my children, not the Sunday school. And we'd like to get that responsibility back on the father's shoulders. Yes? I just wanted to add a comment.

You see, I'm what you call a Christian orphan. I come from a non-Christian home. And if it wasn't for things like this, you know, I'd be kind of out of luck.

And I think you have to remember that people like me... Listen, good point. And somebody in the 810 or 830 service mentioned that. And you see, what we need to realize is that this is a family.

We're all somewhere in the process. Some of us are children here and some are fathers and mothers. And those who come in here who are children in the faith, they may be 50 years old, but they're still children.

They need the help of the fathers and mothers here to grow up. So that this really can be your family. We don't want to leave anybody out.

Okay? Over here. What are some of the frustrations that the teachers are facing? Yes, the question is, what are some of the frustrations that the teachers are faced with? And I suppose if we'd have a teacher stand and tell you, we could go on forever. Problems in getting leadership.

One of our most difficult problems has been to get people to work with our children. There are a number of reasons for that. Our emphasis here at PBC has always been on loyalty to the Lord and not loyalty to a program.

And people feel that keenly. And consequently, there's no false motivation, we hope, to get involved in programs. And consequently, a lot of our people are involved in other things.

They're reading Bible studies out in the community and it's not necessarily serving the needs of this local body. And that's fine with us. We encourage them and that sort of thing.

But it does cause our children's ministry to suffer here. It's very difficult to get leaders. A related problem is that people don't want to miss the adult electives and go out there and teach.

They'd rather be here being taught. And I understand. But beyond this, we just feel that the Lord is saying we need to change directions.

It's actually much more extensive than merely reacting to problems that we have. The Lord's been tapping us on the shoulder saying I have something better for you. And frankly, from where we stand, we don't

know what it is.

But we want to follow Him and find out. Over here. Trey? Terry, over here to Trey.

This week I talked to one of the elders in the church about the Sunday School program. And I challenged him that little kids have a difficult time relating philosophical ideas of behavior with their own life. I talk about Zacchaeus in the tree and I gave you the philosophical nature of kindness and how he's going to repent from his sins.

The kid has a hard time with that. And then if you were to give him arts and crafts or something and ask him to draw frustration, you'd probably take out that crayon and he'd just go crazy on a paper. And he'd begin to learn what frustration looks like, at least in paper.

And you could build him up in degrees. And so I think there's great advantage to teaching younger people on the level that they're used to thinking in school with creative arts and crafts. And we do want to work with this in working with the children.

And so there are new ways of teaching that I think maybe we've not explored yet with arts and crafts in emphasizing cultural things with the kids. And we do plan on doing that with the kids here in this playtime. I want to mention one thing that Dave said.

We emphasize loyalty to the Lord and not programs. But one of the results of emphasizing loyalty to the Lord and not programs is that sheep need to be shepherded. And one of the problems is that our Sunday School program has gone down the tubes.

Why? Well, maybe there's not enough emphasis on the program and getting the right people in the program. And I'm wondering if we're not being a little idealistic. We didn't emphasize the Sunday School program, but the idealism is that people are actually going to teach their kids during the week.

I hate to be just that blunt about it, but you love Jesus, you teach the kids during the week and we'll pray for you and we'll offer you the teaching. My encouragement is that I think that Dave has a great idea that parents do need to teach the children. My exhortation is that if you're not going to take that responsibility, then I would encourage you to call the church and let them know.

I'm not going to teach my kids. The fact is that's not where I'm at. I don't know how to do it.

I'm not willing to do it. So if we do need to emphasize more on the teaching at the church, then just let us know that. That's called vulnerability.

And then maybe we can emphasize more on teaching or something. But we don't want to be idealistic that you're going to teach the kids if you're not. And if you are, that's great.

But if you're not going to, then let us know because we are open to change and willing to change the program. Just some ideas. Let me correct one thing you said.

It's not my idea. It's the Lord's. He's the one that said we're to teach our children.

It's just a question of how we go about doing it. And I'm sure we're bound to make some mistakes along the way, but the direction is right. We've just got to work out the Lord's way of implementing His goal.

Yes, right here. We're going to have to make this the last one, I think. Okay.

I've gone to church most of my life. And when I was young, I went to Sunday school. And I got a lot out of it, but I really didn't know who in the world the Lord was.

I mean, sure, He's a great guy, and my father and my mother knew Him, but I never knew Him. I mean, you know, He was some guy great big and powerful up there, and I could never come close to Him. And this is what I think, that the kids should be able to learn, that He's not some meanie up in the sky, you know, that He really loves everyone, and even kids.

Sure. Even kids. Thank you.

This is sort of like shaking up a Coke bottle and sticking a cork in it. I'm sorry, but it's 20 after, and a lot of you have roasts in the oven and other things. We've got to bring this thing to a close.

There are a number of elders and staff people here, and I'd like to ask you all to hang around here at the front of the auditorium afterward, because I'm sure many of you have questions. And don't be frustrated. Please come up and talk to us, and we're going to have another meeting later on where you'll have a chance to air much more of your feeling.

Okay? Let's stand together and pray, shall we? Lord, thank You for our children and for this opportunity now to begin to teach them and encourage them. And all of us face a task like this with a lot of uncertainty and a feeling that something's been taken away from us that we've counted on a great deal. But we thank You that You never call us to any task without providing adequate resources, and so we rely upon You.

And thank You for what You're going to teach us and our youngsters as a result of our faith. And we thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

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