

Valuing A Child

Purpose:

1. To put before parents and grandparents the actual value of their children as opposed to the values society puts on them.
2. To help family leaders see that though raising their children asks much of them and is sometimes hard, their efforts are well worth it.
3. To embrace the value Jesus put on children and see that by living with his evaluation, one is doing exactly what God has assigned family leaders to do.
4. To see the importance of committing oneself to being trained, so one's offspring can have faith and can defend themselves against evil.

When I was seven years old, my mother took me by train to her hometown in Evansville, Indiana. She told me her cousin there was a millionaire. I immediately started to think of him as someone who could give me some money, some treats. So, I wanted to meet him and see if he would hand out some of what he had. This little story illustrates how normal it is to pay attention to certain people in a position to do us a favor. I was seeing my mom's cousin as a vending machine, not as a person. Similarly, how do we view our children? What value do we place on them? Their value is not in what materialistic treasures they can give us. Children don't have money to share with us. With children, we have to come from a totally different place to see their value.

Ezekiel 34:1-6 warns shepherds not to look on the sheep as to how the sheep can benefit the life of the shepherd. Rather, the shepherd is to tend the sheep the best way possible. He or she is to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed, seek out the lost, and not be domineering or harsh. Or as Jesus says to Peter after his resurrection, "Feed my sheep, tend my sheep, feed my sheep."

This all sounds like a good description of what a parent is to be about. Surely grandparents are to get in on this as well. Parenting is a one-sided, unselfish calling. Like sheep, children are not there to outwardly serve us but to be served. They need our attention and care. If they don't get it, they may very well wander off and, like sheep, they might become food for wild animals. Our children might be misled or taken in by treacherous people. When we think of the demands a child puts on a parent, we can ask why should parents value them in the first place? If we want a life without further responsibilities, why not just refuse to have kids? What is it that makes children so valuable and raising them so worthwhile?

Discussion Questions: Two Questions: Why is it difficult sometimes to value children? Second Question—What is it about children that makes them valuable in your eyes?



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Let us further ponder this question on the value of children. Perhaps you have already spoken of these. One thought is they are a gift from the Lord; ours to love and serve with wisdom and playfulness. Surely their presence gives us new purpose and focus in our lives. That we even have them in our lives is remarkable in and of itself. Also, they are part of our bloodline, extending our family tree into the next generation. In addition, they will be the ones who carry on what we have given them after we are gone—with their spouse, and their own children. Staring us in the face is this—who they become will depend much on how they are raised. And, by the way, we are the ones raising them. We family leaders are the core foundation of our congregation.

Some the main reasons to value them are pointed out to us by Jesus. We are asked to see our children as Jesus did. He saw that many adults have their focus on other adults. We can come and go with adults. They are not so dependent on us. Our offspring are a different story. We know that children can be negative or positive: many cause us to give them 24/7 vigilance and effort, they test our patience, wear us down, and show no gratitude. Is it any wonder that Jesus' disciples decided little kids are not worth the bother? We know some teenagers can be hard to bear. We may feel like we are hitting a brick wall!

But, of course, we also know there is a positive side. Children can make our day. They can help us grow to be less self-serving. They may love to play with us, be read to, cause us to be creative, and bring out something in us we would never see otherwise. Jesus' disciples surely believed the adults Jesus was influencing were the most important people to Jesus. But he confounded them by saying we are to value those people whom are first in the kingdom: his children, the most vulnerable among us. He also recognized these are the ones most apt to be targeted by evil schemers. These vulnerable ones are in danger of being taken advantage of by those seeking to benefit themselves--wolves. We are talking about children, those who lack the defense systems to protect themselves.

Discussion Questions: When you became a parent, what was your life like up to that time? Why do you think that 30% of children growing up in America do not have their birth father there for them? Describe some of the ways it becomes hard for a parent to raise children. Describe why it might be that many dads in America recognize that raising their children is the most meaningful thing in their life, giving them meaning and joy?

When we read Matthew 18:1-14, we discover two things: children, naturally humble and vulnerable, are the greatest people in the kingdom of heaven. This directly challenges what our society tells us when it uplifts people who are rich, famous or powerful - as though they are the most important.

If we read this passage with perception, we realize how adamant Jesus is in making sure his unprepared ones are not entrapped or used by others. He gives severe warnings as to what those intruding into and using the lives of the vulnerable will suffer if they do not repent. He recognizes his young ones will be schemed against but he clearly says none of us need to be involved with this. And we better not because each child has their own angel who sits in the front row before God himself. We must do everything we can to protect and equip our children, the targets of the evildoers - for these young ones are most precious to Christ.



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Discussion Questions: How much effort are we to put in to make sure our children and other vulnerable people do not get harmed or used by someone? How easy is it for an inexperienced, simple-minded, and naive person to fall into someone's trap? What can we do to make sure the vulnerable among us do not become entrapped by people like molesters, internet pornographers, drug dealers, defrauders, seducers, traffickers, domestic violators, misleading messengers and such—the wolves out there?

As parents and grandparents, we hear what Jesus is saying-- how much he values children, the vulnerable, and the inexperienced. We want to do our best to protect them and equip them to protect themselves. Imagine you are walking along a river bank looking at all the stones. Most of them don't seem worth picking up. You see no value in them. But suddenly, your eye spots a gold nugget just lying there. You pick it up and ask yourself, "How can I keep this valuable gold nugget safe? What can I do so I don't lose it? How can I protect it from thieves until I get it to the bank, to a safety deposit box?" That precious gold nugget is the way God wants us to see our children—precious, take good care of them, do whatever you can to keep them safe and not get lost.

Two people come across cans of varied colors of paint ready for the taking. The one sees little value in the paints and moves on. The second person is struck by how these paints can become some worthwhile picture. This person takes all the cans of paint home and goes to work. After many days of learning and testing, this person discovers what can be done with these cans of paint. This person becomes an artist and from the paints creates a beautiful picture. Parents and grandparents are artists. Their relationships to the children in their care, their commitments to these children, their efforts to share their faith, their wise skills, their patience, and most of all their love bring forth a child who has embraced the faith; a child of thoughtfulness, of gifts discovered, with the ability to defend him or herself against evildoers, ready to become a mature adult. These family leaders have truly valued that child.

Discussion Questions: In what ways could children be described as gold nuggets? What is the difference between the two people who, in their wanderings, come across cans of varied colored paint? How much would you like to be the second person when it comes to your offspring?

However, we understand divesting ourselves of other priorities, other distractions may not be that easy. Yes, doing our best for our offspring is the ministry God has assigned us. But few are talking about it, or supporting us to carry out such a calling. One of the main reasons we are in this class, and future classes, is to help us shift gears and get more understanding and equipment for fulfilling what God is asking of us. For the young people in our lives, we are the irreplaceable ones. By tending to them, by having them experience who we are and what we believe, they now have a better chance to be the adults God intended them to be.

We might do well to see ourselves as soldiers do. They leave everything behind: spouses, children, jobs, houses, and cars and they go to boot camp which is not that much fun. But it prepares them for the battlefield ahead. They fight bravely for the sake of those they have left behind. Some are killed where the battle rages. They give their all for those they seek to protect. Some get medals for their



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courage. When they do, they often refer to those who are the real heroes, those who gave their very lives for those back home.

When we consider going on to Course Two where we'll be equipped with weapons and skills with which to protect our offspring for the battle ahead, we need to remember our soldiers. The effort we exert in coming to class does not compare to what our soldiers have done for us. Yet, dare to face the challenge and stick with this and find ways to support and fulfill the family ministry God has assigned to us.

Discussion Questions: Can you describe the commitment a person needs to become a soldier, to get trained, and then go out and risk one's life for others? Compare that to what you are faced with in fulfilling the family ministry God has given you. What attitudes and present time-consuming actions might you have to shift away from to be the parent or grandparent you need to be, to carry out the important ministry Christ has called you to?

There is an opportunity that lies before you. It is valuing the young ones in your lives so much that you sign up for Course Two. You will not regret it. Value yourself, the life and calling God has given you in these few short years you have on this earth. Remember you are the artist creating a great life for your kids. You are the soldier that braves hell and high water to make sure some people you love will have a life worth living. God has given you a most meaningful road to take. Listen to Ephesians 5:15, 16. "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil."

At this point, the facilitator or leader of the class will ask class members to commit themselves to value their offspring so much that they sign up for Course Two. A date to start Course Two needs to be set.

Summary:

1. To appreciate that by highly valuing the lives of their offspring, family leaders have clarity as to the callings they have to fulfill as to what God expects of them.
2. To recognize as parents and grandparents that even though raising offspring can sometimes be hard and demanding, their efforts will make a huge difference.
3. To be about supporting children's faith in Christ so the wisdom shared and demonstrated before them will serve them well.

Prayer Suggestions: 1. To hold on to the value of our children's lives in spite of whatever would detour us from claiming that. 2 That we might have the love, the wisdom and the commitment to help our children have faith and wise skills to fend off evil. 3. That we ask God to be with us as we seek to be faithful in bringing up our children in ways that build up their lives. 4. That we recognize this special opportunity to be in this class; to discuss with others and get further training; and to find ways to overcome obstacles so we can continue participating.



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Quotes Regarding Children for Us to Consider:

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way it treats its children”. Nelson Mandela

Proverbs 17:6 Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their parents.

Luke 18:16 But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come unto me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”

We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today.” — Stacia Tauscher, dancer and artist

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” — Frederick Douglass, abolitionist and statesman

“Children need models rather than critics.” — Joseph Joubert, French moralist

“Every child you encounter is a divine appointment.” — Wes Stafford, President Emeritus of Compassion International

“How you speak to children becomes their inner voice.” -- Anonymous

“A child is a beam of sunlight from the Infinite and Eternal, with possibilities of virtue and vice, but as yet unstained.” — Lyman Abbottren

Children are a gift from the Lord. -Psalm 127:3