

Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15
Children's Ministry
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Children's Ministry

“Children and the Kingdom of God”

INTRODUCTION: We live in an age of both *narcissism* and *vain glory*.

1. There is *proof* of this. This is not merely my opinion.
2. **David Brooks** is one of America's leading journalists, commentators and authors.
 - a) He is a columnist for the *New York Times*.
 - b) He is a commentator of *PBS: The News Hour*
 - c) He is a contributor to *Meet the Press*
 - d) He writes for *The Washington Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsweek*, *The Weekly Standard*, and other magazines.
 - e) and a best-selling author of 4 books.
3. In his book the *Road to Character*, he speaks about the *Narcissism Test* administered by psychologists, school officials and therapists.
 - a) *Over the next few years I collected data to suggest that we have seen a broad shift from a culture that encouraged people to think humbly of themselves to a culture that encouraged people to see themselves as the center of the universe. It wasn't hard to find such data. For example, in 1950, the Gallup Organization asked high school seniors if they considered themselves to be a very important person. At that point, 12 percent said yes. The same question was asked in 2005, and this time it wasn't 12 percent who considered themselves very important, it was 80 percent. (p. 6)*
 - b) Brooks calls this “*the culture of the Big Me.*”
 - c) *Psychologists have a thing called the narcissism test. They read people statements and ask if the statements apply to them. Statements such as “I like to be the center of attention ... I show off if I get the chance because I am extraordinary ... Somebody should write a biography about me.” The median narcissism score has risen 30 percent in the last two decades. Ninety-three percent of young people score higher than the middle score just twenty years ago. The largest gains have been in the number of people who agree with the statements “I am an extraordinary person” and “I like to look at my body.” (pp.6-7)*
 - d) This is the age of “*self-esteem*” (love of self)
 - e) This narcissistic lust for esteem has led to an urge to be “*famous*”
 - f) *Along with this apparent rise in self-esteem, there has been a tremendous increase in the desire for fame. Fame used to rank low as a life's ambition for most people. In a 1976 survey that asked people to list their life goals, fame ranked fifteenth out of sixteen. By 2007, 51 percent of young people reported that being famous was one of their top personal goals. (p. 7)*

4. Brooks points out that this was **not always** the case. In fact, not too long ago *humility* was a prized and pursued virtue.

- a) Prior to World War II we lived in a culture that promoted *self-effacement*.
- b) Now we live in a culture of *self-esteem*
- c) He compared an NFL game to an old film of the WWII Victory celebration. He wrote this ...

A quarterback threw a short pass to a wide receiver, who was tackled almost immediately for a two-yard gain. The defensive player did what all professional athletes do these days in moments of personal accomplishment. He did a self-puffing victory dance, as the camera lingered. It occurred to me that I had just watched more self-celebration after a two-yard gain than I had heard after the United States won World War II. (p. 4-5)

- d) True. In the film *Band of Brothers*, WWII hero **Richard Winters** was asked by his grandchildren, “Grandpa, were you a hero in the War?” And he said, with tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat, “No, but I served in a company of heroes.”
- e) Compare that response to our own day: *Every Veteran, every Policeman, every fireman, every EMT worker, and all government agents are “heroes.”* Really? I mean, really?
- f) **For the record:** I am a Veteran of the U.S. Army and I am most definitely **not** a hero! Not even close!
- g) I was a *public servant*; that’s all.

5. Brooks goes on to compare our day with those of our parents and grandparents of the War Generation:

There was perhaps a strain of humility that was more common then than now, that there was a moral ecology, stretching back centuries but less prominent now, encouraging people to be more skeptical of their desires, more aware of their own weaknesses, more intent on combatting the flaws in their own natures and turning weakness into strength. People in this tradition I thought, are less likely to feel that every thought, feeling, and achievement should be immediately shared with the world at large. There were no message T-shirts back then, no exclamation points on the typewriter keyboards, no sympathy ribbons for various diseases, no vanity license plates, no bumper stickers with personal or moral declarations. People didn’t brag about their college affiliations or their vacation spots with little stickers on the rear windows of their cars. There was stronger social sanction against (as they would have put it) blowing your own trumpet, getting above yourself, being too big for your britches. The social code was embodied in self-effacing style.

6. I am **not** trying to offend you, but I really want to ask you ...

- a) Do we *really* need to hear from a 35-year-old mother of 4 little children, who lives on a farm in Nova Scotia and writes books and blogs about life? *Really?*
- b) Do we need to read a blog of a 42-year-old pastor of a 125-member church in Smith Center, Kansas? *Really?*
- c) Or for that matter, who asked that “famous” pastor of that 4,000-member church to comment on everything in Christendom? *Really!*
- d) And do we need to follow every twitter and tweet from the pro athlete who may be great at his sport but whose moral and spiritual life is in shambles? *Really!*

7. **John MacArthur:** “We now live in an age when people are famous for being famous, and for nothing else. And I fear that I may become one of them! (in 1985)

8. What we need is a return to **Humility**: seeing ourselves as God sees us!

a) Proverbs 3:34 invites us to humility

*Toward the scorers he is scornful,
but to the humble he gives favor.
The wise will inherit honor,
but fools get disgrace. (Prov. 3:34-35)*

b) The N.T. Apostles interpret this Proverb as follows:

(1) *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:6, 10)*

(2) *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:5-7)*

c) **David Brooks** puts it this way ...

(1) *Humility is freedom from the need to prove you are superior all the time, but egotism is a ravenous hunger in a small space – self-concerned, competitive, and distinction-hungry. Humility is infused with lovely emotions like admiration, companionship, and gratitude. “Thankfulness,” the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said, “is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.” (p. 8)*

(2) *This self-centeredness leads in several unfortunate directions. It leads to selfishness, the desire to use other people as a means to get things for yourself. It also leads to pride, the desire to see yourself as superior to everybody else. It leads to a capacity to ignore and rationalize your own imperfections and inflate your virtues. As we go through life, most of us are constantly comparing and constantly finding ourselves slightly better than other people – more virtuous, with better judgement, with better taste. We’re constantly seeking recognition, and painfully sensitive to any snub or insult to the status we believe we have earned for ourselves. (p. 10)*

9. In other words, we are like the Apostles in the early days of their time with Christ.

a) They were **repeatedly** jockeying for position, honor, prestige and - most of all – greatness.

b) *Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will drink*

my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” (Matt. 20:20-23)

- c) The original helicopter mom: “Give my sons glory!”
- d) A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:24-27)
- e) **Key:** “But I am among you as one who serves.”
- f) And yet once again ...

(1) *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1)*

(2) *An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. (Luke 9:46)*

(3) *cf. Mark 9:33*

10. Jesus’ consistent answer: Be humble, be childlike, be a servant!

- a) *But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (Luke 22:26)*
- b) child-likeness ... service ... leads to *greatness* as God defines “great.”
- c) Humble service is the way to honor, greatness, glory.

11. In a culture of *narcissism*, and *glory-seeking*, and *pride* three groups of people **always** get left out, ignored, forsaken:

- a) **The Elderly:** They’re considered too old to be worth anything; i.e., they don’t hold enough clout to promote my glory!
- b) **The Children:** They’re too little to be influential in my search for fame; and not worth my time or effort.
- c) **The Handicapped:** Those with “special needs.” They’re too “broken” to be of use to me in my pursuit of greatness. They are a blind alley to obscurity. They’re “not cool.”

12. America *neglects* these three groups ... horribly! Need proof?

- a) Look at *funding* for our public schools. Those kids are not able to afford private academies.
- b) Look at what we pay *schoolteachers* at both public and private levels, compared to athletes, entertainers and lawyers!
- c) Look at who the lowest-paid *physicians* are: Guess!
 - (1) Highest paid: *Cardiovascular surgeons*: \$681,408/yr.
 - (2) Lowest paid: *Pediatricians*: \$175,000/yr.
- d) Last full-time staff member hired on a church staff? *Minister/ Director of Children’s Ministry*

(1) Second person hired? *The Youth Minister*

(2) Last person hired? *The Children's Minister*

13. **Christ Covenant Church** is no different. We have neglected Children's Ministry for many years.

- a) Not a Ministry Department until I made it one in 2008.
- b) Smallest budget of our ministry departments.
- c) Struggle to find regular volunteers and life-time ministries
- d) **Our largest community in the church!**

14. ... and the **future** of Christianity. Note this fact:

- a) Educators tell us that you must capture a child's mind and heart before they reach the age of 9
...
- b) ... If you don't you're already behind the curve!
- c) *Youth ministry has proven to be an ineffective corrective to failed children's ministry.*
- d) We don't lose our kids to the world in College because the youth group wasn't good.
- e) We lose them at age 19 because we didn't grab their souls for God by age 9!

15. And it is **Jesus Christ** who tells us these truths!

I. JESUS SHOWS ESTEEM FOR CHILDREN (Matt. 18:1-6)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18:1-6)

1. Once again the old dispute: *Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (God)?*

- a) Wrong concern: *Jesus is focused on God's glory.*
- b) Wrong question: *Jesus is asking about service.*
- c) Wrong value: *Jesus promotes humility.*

2. Jesus answers this question with **a child** –

- a) in Greek, a *paidon*
- b) *pais*: general word for child
- c) *paidon*: the diminutive; little child; infant, a toddler; a "kinder-gartener."
- d) **BAGD**: "a very young child, infant"

3. Jesus calls to a toddler to come to Him, caresses him (her), and holds the child before them as a *trophy* –

- a) *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:2-4)

b) In so doing Jesus **reverses** the Jewish social order and turns it upside down.

c) **Knox Chamblin:** *Matthew: MENTOR*; vol. 2; p. 873

'In contrast with their position in contemporary western culture, children occupied a low estate in the ancient world,' for which the small size of the pais or paidion was partly responsible. The status of the child under Jewish law is reflected in the common rabbinic triad 'deaf and dumb, weak-minded, under age.'

d) But Jesus changes all that in one Parabolic action!

e) **R.T. France:** *Matthew: TNTC*; p. 274

Jesus' answer is typically graphic and radical. It amounts to a total reversal of human value scales. A child was a person of no importance in Jewish society, subject to the authority of his elders, not taken seriously except as a responsibility, one to be looked after, not one to be looked up to.

4. Jesus says three things about this child ...

a) **First:** Jesus considered this little child *great*; someone very, very important:

(1) Why? Because this little boy obeyed Jesus!

(2) **Michael Green:** *Matthew; BST*; pp. 190-191

We can be fairly sure that when Jesus called the little lad to him, he came promptly, and stayed where he was put. That child was accounted great by Jesus. Is that not a clue to what real humility means? It means coming when Jesus calls us and staying where Jesus puts us. So humility is not a matter of suppressing our drive and hiding our gifts. Humble people are quite unself-conscious about it all, like the lad. They claim no right from others, or from their master. They follow where Jesus calls and stay where Jesus puts them. That is humility.

b) **Second:** Jesus considered the child to be an *example*; an example of a true disciple:

(1) "unless you turn and become like children"

(2) not innocent, sinless or completely mature

(3) but one who was *humble* and knows her place in life.

(4) a little girl unconcerned with fame or glory!

c) **Third:** Jesus considered that child to be a *member of the Kingdom of God*! Very high status!

(1) *Kingdom of God*: Christ's redeemed community; His new world order; His church on earth/ in heaven.

(2) He would later say this ...

"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 19:14)

(3) Able to believe in Jesus, Love God, be regenerate!

5. **Personal Fact:** My two daughters **Joanna** and **Abigail** trusted in Christ as *paida*.

- a) Joanna at age 5
- b) Abigail at age 4
- c) They never wavered or waned; They are radiant young Christians (ages 37 and 35)

But ... my sons, **Nathan** and **Aaron**, struggled in their faith and were not truly converted until their college years. What was the difference? *Jane invested in and disciplined the girls when they were but children. I waited to disciple the boys when they were in high-school; and was too sporadic, caught up in my own ministry!*

6. Jesus places **Children's Ministry** on the highest of levels –

- a) *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18:5-6)*
- b) They need God's grace, Christ's mercy, and our love and attention.
- c) **David L. Turner:** *Matthew: ECNT; pp. 435-436*

Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they consistently model humility. Rather, children have no status in society; they are at the mercy of adults. Similarly, repentant disciples admit that they have no status before God and that they depend solely on the love of the heavenly Father. The view of greatness inculcated here and based on the model of the child is evidently antithetical to the emphasis on hierarchical rank.

7. **Don't miss Jesus' point:** *Greatness comes from humility, knowing one's own status with God, and serving others whom God loves and esteems. Ministering to children gives us the opportunity to become great in God's eyes! Because ministry to children is service.*

But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:26-27)

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

II. JESUS WARNS US ABOUT NEGLECTING CHILDREN (Matt. 18:10-14)

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matt. 18:10-14)

- 1. Scholars disagree about whom the “*little ones*” points to in Jesus message: children or new believers.
 - a) Obviously in verse 6 the phrase “*little ones*” points to children:

(1) *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18:5-6)*

(2) *“one such child ... these little ones”*

b) Jesus then talks about temptations, and warns us not be the source of temptation for anyone else:

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. (Matt. 18:7-9)

c) He then returns to His reference to *“these little ones”* in verse 10.

(1) **Context** demands that it mean “children” and not “young believers or new converts.”

(2) **John Holland:** *Matthew: NIGTC; p. 735*

The phrase ‘one of these little ones’ has been used at 10:42 in a related way. If it were not for the previous use of the phrase, one would be inclined to take it in 18:6 as a reference to the child in the midst and similar children (but the coming uses in vv. 10 and 14 are not susceptible of such an explanation). In 10:42 the phrase is modified by ‘as a disciple’, here by ‘who believes in me’. In both cases a disciple whose discipleship operates at a modest level is in view; and in both cases there is explicit or implicit contrast with more substantial ‘representatives of the kingdom’.

(3) *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” (Matt. 10:42)*

d) **But I disagree with the majority of commentators** (always a risky thing to do!)

e) The **context** rules: And in these verses (18:1-14) Jesus is primarily talking about children.

(1) children are examples of humble believers (18:1-6)

(2) children as valued by God (18:10-11)

(3) children who need our service (18:12-14)

2. Here is the flaw in the majority interpretation: *They assume that a child and a “sincere believer,” a “little one” and a disciple, cannot be one in the same!*

a) **D. A. Carson:** *God With Us: Themes From Matthew; pp. 112-113*

Verse 5 should be read together with verse 6; and if the flow of thought is carefully observed, the concern of these two verses is not literally “little children” but “these little ones who believe I me” – genuine believers, those who have humbled themselves and become like children. Similarly, in 18:10-14 the expression “one of these little ones” must

be understood to refer to believers, true disciples of Jesus who have honestly humbled themselves.

b) But I say the children can be these believers!

- (1) a 5-year-old *can* be a “true believer” in Jesus
- (2) an 8-year-old *can* be a “genuine disciple” of Christ
- (3) A 10-year-old *can* be a faithful servant of God
- (4) And all children *can* and *should* be members of the church!

c) Our own interpretations *betray our bias* toward ...

- (1) Not taking children and their souls seriously
- (2) Not involving ourselves in the development of our children’s faith
- (3) Not believing that God works in the lives of our children as powerfully as He does in adults.

d) **False! False! False!**

e) *Jesus takes our ministry to children quite seriously.*

3. Jesus tells us to *receive one such child* in His name.

- a) *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18:5-6)*
- b) to **welcome** them into the Kingdom/ Church for the sake of ministering to their souls
- c) **Conversely:** to neglect them is a great sin for which God will hold us responsible.

4. There are *two ways* we show this spiritual neglect:

a) **First:** We can cause them to sin.

- (1) *but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18:6)*
- (2) influencing our children to walk away from Christ and stumble, therefore, into a life of sin.
- (3) **Craig S. Keener:** *Matthew: IVP; p. 285*

Causing one to sin, or literally to “stumble,” meant causing the person to fall from the way of Christ and be damned. Jesus says this punishment would be an act of mercy compared to what is in store for those who turn little ones from Christ’s way – be they arrogant university professors, torturers enforcing Islamic law or gossipers within the church.

b) **Second:** We can despise these little ones thus causing them to perish in hell.

- (1) *See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think?*

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my[e] Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matt. 18:10-14)

- (2) Considering them *not worthy* of our time, our investment in their lives, our financial support for their ministry, our devotion of personnel to shepherd them, our neglect of the facilities they need to flourish as our youngest “community” in the church.

- (3) Treating them as **second class** citizens of the Kingdom.

5. I happen to be one of those who interprets Matthew 18:10 in an “old fashioned” manner –

- a) *See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 18:10)*
- b) I believe in **Guardian Angels**, and at least/ especially for children.
- c) I believe Jesus is saying: *God has a special place in His heart and mind for children, and has commissioned a rank of Angels to watch over them.*

6. **Charles R. Erdman:** *Matthew*; pp. 167-168

- a) *Having pointed out the peril of causing to stumble one of these little ones who trust in him, Jesus further warns his disciples against despising these trustful and dependent followers of his. He does so on the ground that they are so precious to his Father who is in heaven. He declares that the angels who serve or protect or represent them, are nearest to the throne of God, and therefore his followers cannot think lightly of those who are so dear to God.*
- b) His sheep about whom God is concerned – one by one.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. (Matt. 18:12-13)

- c) **Key point:** *So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matt. 18:14)*

III. JESUS INCLUDES IN HIS KINGDOM THE CHILDREN (Matt. 19:13-15)

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And he laid his hands on them and went away. (Matt. 19:13-15)

- 1. About this passage there is no disagreement.
- 2. **David L. Turner:** *Matthew: ECNT*; p. 464

This incident recalls and reinforces Matt. 18:1-14. It is unclear whether the disciples’ rebuke is directed against the children or those who brought them to Jesus. Presumably, the disciples thought

Jesus would not want to be bothered with such an unimportant task. Jesus emphatically turns the rebuke back on the disciples in 19:14 with three statements: a command, a prohibition, and an explanation.

3. **The Command:** They are *never* to keep little children away from Him because he loves the children and the children *naturally* love Jesus. They are special to God and to Christ (*“Let the children come to me ...”*)
4. **The Prohibition:** They are *never* to make it difficult for children to find Christ and draw near to Him (*“... do not hinder them”*)
5. **The Explanation:** They are *never* to be kept out of the church because the Kingdom of God belongs to them (*“... for to such belong the Kingdom of God.”*)
6. **This is crucial:** The “Kingdom of God” was the theme of both Christ’s message and His Mission:
 - a) *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)*
 - b) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)*
 - c) *“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (Luke 17:20-21)*
 - d) *He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)*
7. The Kingdom of God is (1) Jesus’ salvation, (2) Jesus’ rule over us, and (3) Jesus’ Church into which we are to be baptized.

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38-41)

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

8. When Jesus blessed the children, He gave them Aaron’s Blessing.
 - a) *The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)*
 - b) The blessing for the *Covenant People* of God, alone.
 - c) Hence: The children of Believers are *Children of the Covenant*
 - d) Hence, our rationale for baptizing infants for our baptism ritual
 - e) **Book of Church Order: 56-5**

For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. (Acts 2:39; Gen 17:7; Acts 16:31)

9. These children **belong** to God, **belong** to Jesus Christ, **belong** to the church and **belong** to the Kingdom of God!
10. And so their very presence calls us away from the *narcissism* of our age, and calls us to a life of *humble service*.

But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (Luke 22:26)

“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3)

CONCLUSION: One of the goals I failed to accomplish here at Christ Covenant was the building of a *stellar Children’s Ministry* ...

1. We have had some exceptionally faithful staff who’ve invested themselves in Children’s Ministry: **Susan Shepherd, Karen Chambers, Sarah McKissick, Gatha Schleicher, Diane Dworek, Mindy Thorton, Esther Mfonyam, Ashley Shepherd, Tess Clark** and many others.
2. We’ve also had faithful volunteers invested in decades of ministry to our kids: **Amy Wallace, Bob Stone, Todd and Marti Peterson, Ann Blythe, Jenny Blackmon, Janie Biggerstaff, Ginny Joyce** and dozens of others. These are merely a few who come to mind.
3. **But**, here’s what we’ve *failed to do*.
 - a) Facilities: *We have not built first class facilities for our children.*
 - b) Volunteers: *We struggle to fill slots in which we need help in the nursery, classrooms, and children’s church.*
 - c) Vision: *We have not set before the congregation a cogent and exciting vision for what ministry to children can do.*
 - d) Finances: *We have not funded children’s ministry as needed.*
 - e) Curriculum: *We have not availed ourselves to the best materials available for teaching our kids about the Reformed Faith and the PCA.*
4. This is **strategic ministry**: *These children are the future of our Faith.*
5. This is also **tactically important**: *Great Children’s ministry draws and keeps young families* (Just ask Carmel Baptist Church or Calvary Church!)
6. We need *all hands on deck*. We all take a vow, every time a child is baptized – “*Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?*” (“*I do.*”) This is a vow to be kept!

- a) **Elders** – set the example: take turns in the nursery with your wives and daughters (Pastors included).
- b) **Deacons** – join the pastors and elders in this same service.
- c) **Those with the gift of teaching:** Why do you suppose that gifted teachers teach only adults? Is it a waste of your gift to teach the kids?
- d) **Parents of children:** They're your children, you carry the weight of our volunteer force.
- e) **Older saints:** Don't think, "They're not my children. I did my time in the nursery or Sunday school class!" Really? *Well, your aging mother isn't my mom! And your grandson isn't my teen. And your battle with cancer isn't my concern!* Nonsense! Who ever said we only serve our own family and our own needs?

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:13-14)

... even your smallest "neighbor" in the nursery!

- f) **Those with wealth:** Give extra, above your tithe, your faith promise, your building pledge to children's ministry.
- g) **Session:** Join with **Larry Crouch**, and **Amy Wallace**, and the *Children's Ministry Department* in finding all the resources and personnel that we need to minister to children at an A+ level!

7. **Please know** that our special needs ministry to children (the King's Kids) is growing!

8. The Elders have called a **Congregational Meeting** – something we rarely do – in my 11 years here we've called 22 meetings, an average of only 2 per year! The Session has done so to focus our hearts and minds on our "little ones"

- a) Hear a report on our condition
- b) Enlist your help and support
- c) Cast before you a vision

9. Keep this truth in mind as we begin that meeting:

but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 19:14)