

THE HERALD

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The Church Is For Kids Too

By Josh Buice

When I first arrived as pastor of our church, I was a young 33-year old father of two with our youngest daughter expected to arrive very soon. Over the next few years, our family grew from 4 to 6 as two of our children were born. Needless to say, I'm quite certain that our church understood that while I was called to lead our congregation, I too would grow in grace and knowledge of God's word through the years as well.

During my early days of ministry, I can recall a certain culture that was commonplace within our church family. Mothers would make comments that we didn't have anything for the children on Sunday evenings, so they would often stay home. Fathers would allow their boys to play video games during the service to pass the time away and to keep them occupied. Needless to say, that is not the picture of our church today.

As I look back at those days, it breaks my heart to think of the messages that were

being communicated to children by parents who would literally say, "There is nothing for the kids on Sunday night." We wonder why it is that so many children grow up in Christian homes and walk away from the church soon after they leave for the university. Could it be that these children grew up around the church rather than within the church? Could it be that every time they arrived on campus they were whisked away to a special place for children that prevented them from understanding the importance of the gathered assembly of the church on the Lord's Day?

Let me be clear, I'm not opposed to special discipleship opportunities for children and youth within the context of the local church, but there must be a special care to strike balance while at the same time putting emphasis upon the gathering of the church on the Lord's Day for corporate worship. This is true for several reasons.

Discipleship In Worship Services

If we employ a certain logical evaluation, we can easily see that a children's church that lacks any consistency and modeling of what's happening in the worship service serves no benefit for the discipleship of children in the area of worship. In fact, it

actually hinders the children. It prevents them from grasping a full understanding of how God has called the church to worship. This mixed signal will cause the children to be confused when they are then thrust into the actual worship service of the church.

Furthermore, children learn by watching good examples. We model good examples before our children in the realm of athletics. We pay good money to take our children to watch the MLB games in order to teach our children to use good fundamentals in order to increase their skill level in baseball. The same thing is true with regard to football or basketball or any other athletic event. Why would we put children in a room complete with puppet shows, worship videos, and physical activities like jumping jacks and interactive games and then expect the children to be prepared to worship God with the gathered church as they grow older? In such settings, the children are not being disciplined to worship, even if they're being taught the true gospel.

If we intend to raise young ladies and young men to be faithful members of the church—we must intentionally disciple them with the truth of the gospel and the functional worship of God's people on the Lord's Day.

Children Understand More Than You Think

How many times as a parent have you looked at your spouse with the look of amazement or shock depending on the situation, and repeated a phrase or sentence that came out of your child's mouth at a very early age? This is a repeated pattern as

your children grow. We are shocked at the rate in which children retain information.

On Wednesday evening we offer a catechism class where we teach the children both the verses and theology of Scripture. This is a wonderful way to teach children to know God and to grow in the knowledge of holy Scripture. Sometimes, we have to use big words in order to help children understand what's actually being taught in the Bible. Attempts to reduce the Bible to the level of young children often fails to actually teach the meaning of the biblical text. We fail to realize that children understand far more than we can imagine.

John Dewey (October 20, 1859 – June 1, 1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational pioneer who left an indelible mark on the educational system in America and beyond. He argued that parents lacked the ability to properly educate their own children. Therefore, the public school rather than the home was considered the training ground for the next generation. A few years earlier, the industrial revolution took fathers away from their homes to factory jobs and now the children were being taken away from the home too. These two key streams of influence radically altered how children were taught in the years that followed.

Soon thereafter, the church would follow in that same pattern of thought. This way of thinking began to impact how the local church functioned. Children were separated from their parents and from the life of the local church in order to properly disciple them. The idea that children need special teachers rather than pastors and peers

rather than their families and the gathered church became the normal pattern of church life. That would influence how mothers and fathers look at the local church, leaving some families to stay home from church on Sunday nights because there isn't anything specifically designed or offered for children. It would likewise influence pastors and church leaders to rethink church and redesign how the church functioned in order to reach parents with that same attitude. In many cases, church leaders throughout history began looking to John Dewey rather than Jesus Christ to design the ministry of their local church.

A simple examination of the Bible will reveal that children were with their parents when Ezra stood with the open Scriptures at a pulpit in Nehemiah 8. In one of the most sobering scenes in Scripture, the people of God gathered themselves together in order to renew their covenant just prior to crossing the Jordan river. It was at this moment that Moses addressed the people by saying: *Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess* (Deut. 31:12–13).

Notice the fact that the “little ones” are named among the group. This seems to be the ordinary pattern from both Old Testament and New Testament. In another sobering scene, Jesus rebuked the disciples for sending the children away in Matthew

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

Think about it, the very men referred to as “disciples” were turning children away from Jesus. They were doing the opposite of what their title requires and Jesus let them know in short order that it was unacceptable.

Apparently the early church didn't have “youth church” when Paul was preaching and the young man named Eutychus fell out of the open window in Acts 20. Time and time again in the pages of Scripture, we see families gathered together for the preaching and teaching of holy Scripture. The ordinary means of grace and the Spirit applied word constantly washing over our families within the context of the church is God's appointed means of discipleship, evangelism, and church growth.

We must avoid the idea that church nurseries are sinful or that youth groups are devilish inventions of man-centered approaches to ministry while retaining a commitment to the Lord's Day worship that disciplines children in the gospel with a biblically prescribed worship model. The sights and sounds of little ones among the gathered church should be a great encouragement to the church body.

Do the children and youth of your local church believe that the church is for kids too?

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Article taken from the G3 Blog. Josh Buice is the founder and president of G3 Ministries and serves as the pastor of Pray's Mill Baptist Church on the westside of Atlanta.

FUNNIES

After graphically telling the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man was brutally beaten, robbed, and left for dead, Mrs. Martin asked her Sunday school class, "If you saw a person lying beside the road all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?"

A thoughtful little Maggie broke the hushed silence, "I think I'd throw up."

Margaret and Fred Ziggler wanted a "truly Christian" dog. So they went to a kennel that specialized in that particular breed. There they found a dog they liked. When they asked him to fetch a Bible, he did it in a flash. When they instructed him to look up John 3:16, he turned right to it. "Oh, we'll take this pup, he's wonderful," said Margaret and Fred.

That night the Zigglers invited friends from their church over to meet the remarkable dog. The guests were impressed with Fido's ability to do Christian tricks. "Can he do regular dog tricks, too?" they asked. That stopped the Zigglers cold; they'd never even thought of that.

"Well," they said, "let's try this out." So they clearly pronounced the command "Heel!"

Quick as a wink, the dog jumped up, put his paw on Fred's forehead, closed his eyes in concentration, and bowed his head.

Some people shared their most embarrassing moments:

One time as a waitress, a guy asked me for extra mashed potatoes. I replied, "they are mashed as much as they can mash them."

When I was in court I forgot what to call the judge and I accidentally called him "Your Majesty" and he was like WHAT and I REPEATED IT!

I went into a shop and when I left they said "have a nice day" and I replied "no thank you." I thought they were asking if I wanted a receipt.

I was eight months pregnant and saw someone I knew at a restaurant. They said "Oh wow! What are you having?" And I said "chicken."

I work in retail and was talking to a customer. I meant to say "I'll be right back" or "I won't be long" instead I said "I won't be back" and walked away.

When I was seven I went to sign up for a library card at the library and the lady at the desk was filling out my form and asked "name of the father?" And I said "and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

I held the door open for a woman and she said "thank you." I tried to say "you're welcome" or "not a problem" but my mouth said "you're a problem."

I took my dog to the vet and the vet tech asked me to walk over and use the scales. I go over and get on the scales. She says "I meant use the scale for your dog, ma'am."