

I. Advanced Organizer

- A. If you're single (or if not, think back to when you were): who do (did) you look to for advice? Ever consider doing this?
 - 1. video on kids and dating.
 - 2. what seems unique about this is the sincere openness to kids' perspectives
 - 3. kids aren't just punchline providers. There's a genuine curiosity about their perspectives.
 - 4. what might they bring to us?
- B. My call to pastoring came when I was pregnant with my first kid.
 - 1. "I can't be a senior pastor. I'm about to become a Mom." "Leah, the pastor I'm calling you to be, needs to be a mom."
- C. Theme for today. Celebrate Together - "Together With Kids"
 - 1. Jesus seemed fond of children. For a guy who wasn't married or a parent, he seemed to spend a lot of time with or draw his followers attention to them.
 - 2. Is there something there for us to notice? What might we be missing, whether we're parents or not, in our experience of growing in faith in community, if kids aren't an important part of it?
 - 3. or "4 Ways Kids Help Me Grow In Faith"

II. Kids Are Gifts

- A. We live in the era of helicopter moms and pinterest worthy birthday parties. Despite what we might think from our cultural point of view, in the ancient world, **many cultures did not value children highly, perhaps because the rate of infant and child mortality was so high, maybe for some it was easier not to get too attached.** But the people of God, beginning with the Hebrew people and continuing into the early church possessed a very different view of children than their cultural neighbors
 - 1. see it in texts like these:
 - a) **"Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him."** (Psalm 127:3)
 - b) **"Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children."** (Proverbs 17:6, NIV)
 - 2. Aligns with **overall vision of the Hebrew people** - children are a blessing, part of God's intention to humanity, spoken at creation where the first couple was commissioned to be fruitful and multiply. This meant that amongst the Hebrew people, **child sacrifice was not an issue, as it was for many other ancient cultures.** Children were highly valued.
 - a) Now if you, like Jason and I, have gotten caught up in the latest Hulu craze, *The Handmaid's Tale*, you are probably aware of the **painful patriarchal cultural practices that on obsession with childbearing can produce.** (If you don't know what I'm talking about, google it later).
 - b) But the **greater point is that the faith of the Hebrew people affirmed the raising of kids as a practice unto God.** Yahweh was part of their childrearing. Boys were circumcised on the 8th day. Children were taught the torah from an early age. The festivals, the calendar of the community, brought kids into the practice of faith from infancy on, and this was understood as right and good.
 - c) Further, the law regularly called the Hebrew people not just to care for their own kids, but when tragedy struck, to **provide for the widows and orphans.** Much of the prophetic writings make clear that God was evaluating his people based on that criteria, how they were fulfilling it.
 - 3. **This is my 11th Mother's Day.** And like most parents, I feel like it's impossible to describe the gift that my kids have been to me, even as they have taken more out of me than I could have imagined was in me to give. No doubt, on a daily basis it is often easier for me to

often be more aware of the way my kids exhaust me than the gift they are to me, but at the end of the day, **I can't help but acknowledge how much I'm enriched by them.**

4. There's **a reason we refer to newborn babies as miracles.** Fresh out of the womb we often are most in touch with the awesome reality that something divine and mundane at the same time has taken place. A body has grown a human being. Anyone who has tried to get pregnant knows how little control you ultimately have, how rocky the ride can be between hope for success, and disappointment when conception alludes you. Any woman whose had a miscarriage or a still birth knows the extreme grief when hope and joy give weigh to loss and sorrow. Sometimes in a world obsessed with image, status, and self-presentation, I fear **at times we're tempted to turn our kids into our accessories** - the identity markers that project a certain image if ourselves or prove to others on Facebook we've succeeded at something, **rather than receiving the miracle for what it is.**
5. Every human being is precious. Every human begin starts as a child. And every child is a gift to be received with gratitude, humility, and love.
6. Repeat: Kids are gifts.

III. Kids Disrupt.

- A. **Much about life with kids includes disruption.** Birth, as it naturally happens, is by nature a disruptive, unscheduled activity. It doesn't matter how many times your doctor tells you that your due date is just an estimate, if you make it to 40 weeks, you feel pretty frustrated by your son to be kid's lack of consideration for a predictable schedule. And that only continues as they actually come into the world. Midnight feedings. 3 am stomach flues, crap all over the floor when you have a guest over, kids just don't seem to mind disrupting your plans.
- B. This reality of life with kids was evident in one of the most familiar accounts we have in regards to how Jesus interacted with kids:
 1. ***13 One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.***
 2. ***14 When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." 16 Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.*** (Mark10)
 3. Likely the disciples weren't keeping them away just cause they don't like kids. **But these are Jesus' handlers and blessing babies wasn't on the itinerary.**
 4. **Jesus didn't view the kids (or their parents) as disruption.** Doesn't mind the change in itinerary. They were family. In fact..."Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children." They have something to teach us and we need to attend to them and their needs. They are not lesser, or something to be pacified and then get onto the real agenda. They are as important as anyone else, if not more. Attending to their needs is the work we are to be about. Seeing to the needs of all those who are vulnerable and in need, whatever their age, is the work we are to be about.
 5. Further, **Jesus sees an eagerness, a hunger, sense of need and longing in these kids that we would do well to learn from.** Rather than devaluing their eagerness for Jesus as childish, he wants the grown ups in the room to prioritize it and **learn from it.**
- C. **One of the hardest parts of parenting for me has been and still is the continual juggle and submission to changes of plans.** To disruptions. The number of times I've had a meeting schedule or an itinerary I'm looking forward to, and then I get a call that one of my kids has a fever at school. Or I'm working on my sermon and I have to leave it to resolve a fight. Or

I'm shooting off emails and Gwen asks me not to look at my phone but to sit on the couch with her and read her a book. Now sometimes I do need to find ways to entertain my kids while I do other things. (When Elliott was 2-3, I used to park the car in front of an intersection where the El-train in Chicago passed on the street so he'd watch the crossing the train for an hour while I studied for grad school.) But other times I need to let go of my agenda, let go of my important plans, and let me kids change them.

D. This has helped me become more open-handed in all kinds of ways, acknowledging the reality, that kids or not, we do not have control of our destinies. We hate that truth, but its true nonetheless.

1. James 4, ***"13 Look here, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.' 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. 15 What you ought to say is, 'If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.'"***

2. **Make plans, but hold lightly to them.** You never know what's coming. You need room in your understanding of life to be disrupted - in your career, in your relationships, in your education, in your journey of faith.

3. **I learned this just this week as I found myself receiving increasingly desperate emails from my kids school...** (PTA story).

E. I've already mentioned how the Hebrew people, as well as the early church were counter cultural in their valuing of kids, compared to some of their neighbors. For early Christians this as particularly true throughout the Roman Empire. **Infanticide was a very common culturally-accepted practice in Rome.** This was how you dealt with the disruption of unplanned for pregnancy or a child with special needs or a gender you didn't want to invest your time and resources in. It was culturally acceptable, when that happened to abandon the children - leaving infants exposed to the elements, either to perish or be taken by someone else. If the kids didn't die, they generally were captured by slave owners and raised to be slaves and prostitutes. But the early church made it their mission to rescue as many abandoned babies as they could, and raise them as their own. For these Christians, Jesus' view of kids as gifts to whom the kingdom belonged, compelled them to allow their lives to be disrupted.

F. Repeat: Kids disrupt

IV. Kids grow us up

A. Lots of verses about importance of discipline.

1. Proverbs 22:6 ***"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."*** (NRSV)

2. Proverbs 29:17 ***"Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart."***

3. Ephesians 6: ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."***

B. **Kids need grown ups to grow up.** Not just parents, a group of adults around them.

1. Studies have shown it's important as kids develop to have something like four to six trustworthy, reliable adults in their lives to look to for direction and support. "It take a village", is true, and increasingly as more of us don't live with grandparents or other

extended family close by, the adults are friends from church, from school, from the neighborhood.

2. **The higher ratio of adults to youth correlates with more kids graduating from high school.** Kids need adult support from all sides, not just at home.
- C. Had to learn much more about **personal responsibility** as a parent than ever before. **Hardest part of parenting now.** Sometimes I long for the time when my biggest challenges had to do with nursing, spitup, and poop. Helping kids understand the problem with dishonesty, deal with temptation, anger, conflict, rise to do hard stuff that they don't want to do...these are much more challenging in many ways.
- D. The whole process has made me **more aware of sin: mine and my kids.**
 1. I see how often **they struggle to follow directions**, to make good choices. I'm disappointed when they fail, but **I'm also aware of my own challenges.**
 2. I might not be tempted to steal snacks or lie about how I spend my money, but I can be challenged to keep my temper in check.
 3. Ephesians 6 catches the challenge - training without exasperating. Validating to know this is a common problem.
- E. More appreciation for the **tension God feels loving his kids and disciplining them.**
- F. Repeat: Kids grow us up

V. Kids Remind Us How Little We Know

- A. Greatest in Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:
At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."
- B. Jesus regularly invites his followers to **see the presence of God in unlikely places, particularly in the eyes of the vulnerable.** Children fall in this category. They know they have need. They're not trying to prove to everyone that they're the greatest. Young children don't have that kind of ambition. They're not embarrassed to ask for help. They know there know more than they do and they're eager and curious to learn from them.
- C. **How many of us are regularly cultivating that kind of curiosity toward others? How many of us are regularly cultivating that curiosity towards God?**
- D. Sometimes the most helpful and revelatory moments with kids have come for me when **they've asked a smart question that I can't answer.** They're not bound by our boundaries of what we can know or what we can't. What's important to consider, and what's not. And that reminds us how limited our knowledge is. I think this is what Jesus was inviting his followers to consider when he invited them to become like children. **He wanted them to maintain their curiosity**, and live with the kind of freedom that kids have to allow for mystery.
- E. Sometimes as we train our kids, or try to answer their questions about faith, we can be **too quick to shut down responses of uncertainty.** This, I think does them a disservice, as it does for us.
- F. **I want my kids to ask good questions.** I want to be honest with them about my own. I don't want them to just accept a list of propositions as true because I say so, and then struggle when reality disrupts their framework, when tragedy strikes, when cognitive dissonance sets in.
- G. **I want to connect my kids with a good, loving God, who is able to navigate the swirl of questions life presents with them. I want to navigate that swirl with God myself.**

- H. This is ultimately what we mean when we say in Blue Ocean, “Our approach to spiritual development is **childlike faith**.”
 - I. We look to our kids to remind us how important it is to know our own needs, to be aware of our own limitations, and to find God, the one who invites us to regard him as a loving Parent, in the mystery of unknowing.
 - J. Repeat: Kids remind us how little we know.
- VI. Conclusion
- A. Pray for our kids, and our role as adults....