

## **Building a Church That Values Children**

---

Rich Nathan

April 28-29, 2007

Building a Church for Others Series

Mark 9:33-37; 10:1-16

One of the ways that you can measure the greatness of a country or the greatness of a civilization is by how that country or civilization treats people on the margins. Wealthy people, healthy people, smart people, and well-connected people – those folks always do well in every culture. It is people on the margins, people who are dependent upon others, people with disabilities, the elderly, the poor, people in prison, children – it is how a country or civilization treats people on the margin that determines how great the country that we have really is.

See, we don't measure the greatness of America by how many times we can blow up the world, how many bombs we have, how much we pay a professional athlete, or the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. We don't measure the greatness of America by how big the house is of a Hollywood celebrity, or how high the stock market is. Measure the greatness of America by how we treat people on the margins; how we relate to the weakest and most dependent of our citizens.

Today I want to talk about how we in our country relate to our kids. Kids in America, like kids all over the world, face a number of challenges. We have educational challenges in our country and in our state. About a third of all school-age children are at least one grade level behind in academic performance. In America, less than 3 out of every 10 fourth graders read at grade level. Only one-third of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in reading. And since reading, especially reading for enjoyment, is a key indicator of a whole set of other issues, like teen pregnancy and drug use, and academic performance, and high school drop-out rates, we ought to be very concerned as a country by the poor reading skills of our children, and especially the lack of reading for enjoyment. In fact, parents, one of the best ways you can help your child to succeed is to encourage your child to read, especially to learn to read for pleasure.

We've got challenges in this country educationally. When compared with other nations, American students come up way short. Recent studies of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 25 other industrialized nations show that American students rank 21<sup>st</sup> in mathematics out of 25 nations. And if we were better at mathematics, we would realize that ranking 21<sup>st</sup> out of 25 nations is not good.

Kids are facing health challenges in America. We have a growing crisis of obesity. When you combine couch-potato behavior and computer games, and super-sized fast food meals, and the fear that parents have of sending their kids

to public playgrounds unsupervised, and the demise of gym programs, we have a health crisis of obesity in kids.

We have a challenge of substance abuse. There is good news that tobacco use among kids is definitely falling. But we still have one out of every five kids under that age of 17 who say that they've used some illegal substance in the past year ranging from marijuana to hallucinogens. Significant numbers of adolescents still binge drink.

We have the challenge of violence in our schools. And it not only the occasional shocking outbreak of violence like we recently witnessed at Virginia Tech. Many children face serious violence in going to public school. 20% of middle schools in America report one or more serious violent crimes, like murder, rape, suicide, the use of a weapon, or robbery. 3 out of 10 public schools report that gangs exist in their schools. Millions of parents report that they are uneasy about their children's safety. And a million teenagers miss days of school last year because of fear of physical violence at their school.

I have been doing a series on Building a Church for Others. I said last week that if a church only exists for its own members, whatever else it is, it is not a church – it is a religious club; it is a religious clique; it is a group of friends who get together; or, my favorite analogy – it is a box of puppies licking one another – but it is not a church. According to the New Testament, a church is only a church when it exists for people outside of the church. That's why our vision statement reads:

Our vision as a church is "to be a **R.E.L.E.V.A.N.T.** church that does not exist for itself, but for Christ and for the world."

Today, as I continue this series on building a church for others, I want to talk about Building a Church that Values Children. Let's pray.

If the greatness of a country is measured by how we relate to those on the margins, and particularly how we relate to the weakest, those dependent, the most needy, then America has a long way to go in becoming a great country, particularly with respect to the way we relate to children.

There is a very insightful book written in the 1980's, written by David Elkind, titled *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*. One way that we devalue children in America is by creating the hurried child.

### The Hurried Child

What did Elkind mean by the "hurried child"? Here is what he says:

Hurried children are forced to take on the physical, psychological, and

social trappings of adulthood before they are prepared to deal with them. This takes place in a wide range of ways. Pressure, for example, is placed on children to achieve at earlier and earlier ages. Parents are not only attempting to teach their children to read before they enter kindergarten, but now place their babies in front of laptop computers and encourage them to bang away on the keyboard. Kindergartens increasingly offer academic curricula in hopes of giving kids an edge when they start elementary school. Children showing athletic prowess are placed on special teams as quickly as possible in order to learn the fundamentals of a sport. In these and many other ways, children are hurried into achievement-to-please, rather than in the sheer joy of learning and playing in ways appropriate to their stage of life.

In other words, in America we no longer allow children simply to be children – to play in unstructured ways without coaches; to sing without music teachers; to dance without dance lessons; to roll around and get dirty; to make up games that aren't purchased from The Discovery Store.

There is a particular wickedness at work in hurrying our children today and that is in hurrying the sexualization of children. The average age in which a child is first exposed to Internet pornography is 11 according to Family Safe Media. Of kids 8-16, 90% have viewed pornography online usually while doing homework. The rapid increase of child pornography is really a symptom of the sexualization of childhood in the last 30 years in America.

So we see 9-year old girls wearing little halter tops that say "Porn Star" on them; and, middle class parents purchasing shorts for their little girls that say "Sweet Thing" across their bottoms; and MTV offers a little online booklet for teenagers titled "It's Your Sex Life: Your Guide to Safe and Responsible Sex" which offers this guidance:

Fundamentally, it's your body and it is up to you what you do with it.

Mass media despises our children. The movie industry cynically hides behind its rating system while knowing that there is no way that they will reap the profits they want to reap unless their recordings, programs, and films reach the youth market. The coarseness of the language put in the mouths of children, and the complete loss of innocence portrayed in contemporary movies is just absolutely stunning, even for folks raised in America 20-30 years ago.

Whenever I see another example of the premature sexualization of children, or teens, I think about Jesus' words in Matthew 18:6:

**Matthew 18:6**

If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were drowned in the depths of the sea.

Friends, there are a lot of millstones that are going to be handed out on the Day of Judgment.

We not only have the hurried child in America, but we devalue children by making children inconvenient.

### The Inconvenient Child

The business world demands that its employees be completely flexible in hours, in weekends, in the willingness to move anywhere at the drop of a hat. Globalization, according to the corporate powers, requires total economic efficiency which means that we need to be able to move people around like so many cogs in a machine – all of this without regards to the impact of uprooting upon children. Children, who thrive on stability, experience the pressure upon their parents to be instantly available to the corporation.

More and more children are seen as inconvenient. They get in the way of business. They cost a huge amount of money which pinches the self-gratification of parents and would-be parents in a consumer society in which life's value is measured by your acquisition of stuff. Children cut down on your capacity to consume.

We have traveled so far in America and in the western world away from the biblical portrait of children found in Psalm 127:3-6:

#### **Psalm 127:3-6**

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

Children are a blessing from the Lord. Most Christian countries say: Children are a great inconvenience. In fact, children are so devalued that in Western Europe, there is a growing concern among government about the depopulation of countries. George Weigel, who is one of the most insightful writers alive today, wrote a terribly troubling book on Western Europe titled *The Cube and the Cathedral*. And, in detail, he writes about the unwillingness of Western Europeans to engage in the most fundamental cultural task, the task of perpetuating their civilization via bearing children. Europeans, he says, have become so fundamentally consumer driven and selfish that children are simply an inconvenience that is to be avoided at all costs. So, the birth rate of European

nations is well below the death rate. And some countries over the next several decades are looking at halving their populations.

The inconvenient child. We see the inconvenient child because of the pace of contemporary life in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Children take time. And simply transporting your child from one activity to another in the back of a mini-van does not produce a healthy, loving, follower of Jesus Christ. Children take time. But we live in a country that has no time. And because many of us are separated from extended families, our kids are disconnected from that group of people who could both give us time and give time to our children – that is, grandparents. Some of the most valuable people in the life of a child are grandparents because they uniquely take time for kids. But we live in a country that devalues the role of grandparents. And we scatter around the world seeking better employment opportunities that take children away from their grandparents.

Tragically, all of human history witnesses another kind of child – the abused child.

### The Abused Child

At the time God sent his Son into the world to save us from our sins, it was the Roman custom to place a newborn baby on the ground in front of his father for the father to inspect. When the father lifted the child up, it symbolized the child's acceptance into the family. The weak, handicapped, unwanted girls, for just another unwanted mouth to feed, would be left on the ground with the implication that the child should be exposed. What exposure meant was the practice of leaving an unwanted child at a site – usually a garbage dump or dung heap, where the child either died or was taken by a stranger to be raised, usually to be raised as slave. Or sometimes raised to be trained to be a gladiator, or in the case of girls, raised to become prostitutes.

But exposure has a long history. It was advocated by some of the great Greek philosophers like Plato. One of the saddest things that you can do is to read the history of the treatment of children. In surveying human history, Lawrence Stone, who is an eminent historian of the family, writes:

One learns about the ways the writers of antiquities treated infanticide as a normal and sensible way to dispose of unwanted children; how they amused themselves by using little children for [various sexual practices]; of how the bones of child sacrifices are to be found in the foundations of buildings ranging from 7000 BC to 1843 AD; of how 17<sup>th</sup> century nurses played catch-ball with the tightly swaddled infants and sometimes dropped them with lethal consequences; of how infants were dipped in ice-cold baths, in order to harden them, but in practice sometimes killing them; of how children were ferociously beaten, shut up in the dark, deprived of food, terrified by bogey-men, taken to see hangings and corpses, sold into

prostitution, blinded and otherwise mutilated to attract alms, castrated for the purposes of magic, had their teeth ripped out for dentures – and so on, and so on, and so on.

The cruel truth is that history is littered with child victims.

And finally, there is what one could call the “normal” child.

### The “Normal” Child

What is normal now for kids in America? Most kids in America will not be physically abandoned by their parents. But millions will be traumatized by getting the emotional leftovers following the divorce or disillusion of their families. It is normal for children in America to be raised without dads. Most kids won’t become drug addicts or alcoholics. But it is normal for kids in America to abuse alcohol and drugs on an irregular basis. Less than 1 out of 5 kids will drop out of school before receiving a high school diploma. But it is normal for kids to get an inadequate education in America.

Very few children will be pulled into the child pornography industry. But it is normal for our kids to become sexualized at an earlier and earlier age. And most children will wind up with a sexually transmitted disease and will not be virgins when they are married.

It is normal for children to be regularly exposed to vulgar and violent content in TV and movies, video games, and music.

In short, normal kids in America fall prey to the constantly deteriorating definition of normality. As one child psychologist put it, the end result of growing up in America is that we will become:

A country of adults whose standards have been lowered and sensitivities have been blunted. Among the gifts of childhood that have become or are rapidly becoming extinct include innocence, civility, patience, joy, and trust.

What produced any change in world history regarding the way that we treat children? What caused fathers in Europe to stop leaving their children on the ground to be exposed to the elements? What force, or power, changed the way people thought about using children for the sexual pleasure of adults, or using children as spare body parts, or killing unborn children? What is it that calls human beings to rethink the way they value children?

It is this one shattering event: God sent his Son into the world to bring about a revolution in the entire way that we human beings do life. God sent his Son into the world to change the way we human beings do life - the way that we relate to

God and the way we relate to each other, the way we relate to ourselves, the way we relate to our kids. How did Jesus teach his followers to create an alternative society in whatever country they live in, in whatever age they live in? How did Jesus teach his followers to create an alternative society in the midst of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, or 21<sup>st</sup> century America specifically as we relate to kids?

It is apparent that America devalues children. But how can we who are followers of Jesus protest American values? How can we here at the Vineyard value children?

Here is what we read in Mark 9:33-37:

**Mark 9:33-37**

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

We value children, by valuing Jesus.

We value children by valuing Jesus.

Jesus is not setting up children as models to be imitated. He is not some 19<sup>th</sup> century sentimentalist about kids and their sweetness or angelic nature. Children in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism were not considered to be especially pure, or especially good, or especially innocent. The reason Jesus took a child and put the child in the midst of the disciples was to respond to the disciples' notion of greatness. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, there was no one more insignificant than children, no one who ranked lower on the scale of rankings than children.

What Jesus is doing for his followers is he is upsetting the whole ranking system of his followers. What he is saying is: If you want to be my follower, you are going to have to utterly redefine for yourself what it means to be great.

We know what 21<sup>st</sup> century America means by greatness. Greatness means getting your face in the tabloids. Greatness means having a huge house in a gated community. Greatness means making a huge splash.

Jesus says, "I am going to redefine for you greatness." Greatness means being involved with the least significant people in the eyes of 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Greatness means being involved with folks who have no influence, no priority,

and no importance except to God. Greatness to Jesus in this context means being involved with and serving the needs of children.

See, even in the church we are more shaped by the value system of America than we are the value system of Jesus because, let's be honest, we have a ranking order of greatness in the church. Who is more valuable for us to serve – adults or children? For the vast majority of us, we would say, "Honestly, it is adults." That's why many people clamor to get on the adult worship team to be up here on the stage on Sunday morning, but would feel that using their musical gifts to play for children would be a waste of their talent. That's why many folks clamor for teaching opportunities among adults, but would be disappointed to be told, "If you want to use your teaching gift best, why not teach kids, or teenagers?"

It is because we are shaped more by the value system of America than the value system of Jesus that in many churches kids get the leftovers in terms of facilities, room assignments, and chairs. "Well, these chairs are too broken for adults to sit in, let's give them to the kids." "That dingy room, that dark basement – adults wouldn't want to be down there with the smell of mold and must, but it is OK for children." Give the kids the dregs. Give the kids the crumbs.

Jesus came to turn that whole mindset upside down, to redefine greatness in his kingdom. And I praise God that there are hundreds and hundreds of people here at the Vineyard who have had their minds renewed according to the value system of the kingdom of God.

But you know, tangentially, we are so perverse in our thinking in America, that even though Jesus holds up children as a way of challenging our ranking systems, we exploit children to reinforce our ranking systems, our elite status, and our superiority. Just read people's Christmas letters. "Buffy recently turned 7 and finished writing her first major symphony." [read: Buffy can't quite play chopsticks on the piano.] Just read people's Christmas letters and you will see how we use kids to bolster our own sense of superiority.

Look at the bumper stickers people have on their cars:

My child was elected hall monitor.  
My child cleans the erasers for her 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class.

I love the bitter responses to all the bragging that goes on in bumper stickers – the one bumper sticker that reads:

My child can beat up your child.

In a very perverse way, even Christians use their kids as an alternative for bolstering our own sagging self-esteem.

My home may not be as nice as yours, and I may not be as professionally successful as you are, but my kids are a whole lot nicer than your kids.

But when Jesus says in Mark 9:37:

**Mark 9:37**

Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

He is saying something that goes beyond redefining greatness. He is saying something about his followers understanding of who he is and the nature of the kingdom he came to bring. You see, Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. And it was in Jerusalem that the disciples imagined that Jesus was going to set up his earthly kingdom. They were arguing with each other about what position each of them would hold in the new government of Messiah Jesus. Who was going to be Vice President? Who was going to be the Secretary of State? Who was going to be the Duke and Prince?

And what Jesus is communicating here by holding up a child is that his kingdom is going to come not by way of conquest, but by way of suffering and brutalization and victimhood. The disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about when he said in Mark 9:31-32:

**Mark 9:31-32**

because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered over to human hands. He will be killed, and after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

He says essentially, “Just as this child in our world is vulnerable and subject to brutality and exposure and exploitation, so the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands. And when you welcome one of these little children, who is vulnerable and weak, and easily hurt, and you do it in my name, you welcome me.”

There are so many applications of this, friend. When I think of people who really understand what Jesus is saying here about receiving him through receiving the least of the children, I think of Christians in history like Thomas Bernardo, who lived in England in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tom was converted in a great revival that took place in 1859. He set out to become a missionary to China. So he went to London to study medicine so that he could be a medical missionary. But while he was in London, he began finding children who were living in the streets, especially in London’s East-end, the area of London that

Charles Dickens wrote about in *Oliver Twist*. It is an area filled with orphaned children.

One day Tom met this young boy named Jim Jarvis. Tom Bernardo wrote:

Jim was a quaint little vagabond. And beneath all of his external appearances of mirth, there was a sad undercurrent of sorrow that brought tears to our eyes.

Jim led Tom Bernardo out to the roof of a shed. And as they climbed up higher and higher onto that roof, he saw 11 boys huddled together on this rooftop for warmth. No roof or covering of any kind was over them and the clothes they had were in rags. Tom said it was at that moment that he renounced his career of being a missionary in another country and decided to work with poor children in London.

Tom began to open up orphanages around the East-end of London. He started schools, but there were so many kids and so little resources. One night a little boy, who was known as Caris, because of his red hair, came to one of his orphanages, but it was already filled for the night. And so, he was sent on his way. Caris was later found dead of exposure inside of a sugar barrel where he had bedded down to sleep. Bernardo adopted a new slogan for his ministry:

No destitute child ever refused admission.

Tom Bernardo understood Jesus' words:

Whoever receives a child in my name receives me.

You value a little child, especially the most marginalized of children; you are showing that you value Jesus, that you understand the way the kingdom comes. When I think of examples in our church of people who understand what it means to receive children in Jesus' name, I think of Deb Petermann, who has been working for years setting up our ministry to kids who have disabilities. Week after week, Deb works here with autistic children and their families.

I think of folks like The Millers – Ben and Melissa Miller, who have worked with an organization that is reaching out to the Invisible Children in Northern Uganda. There is an amazing film out called "Invisible Children: Rough Cut". It is a documentary about the children in Northern Uganda who have been forced to become soldiers. This documentary shows thousands of children fleeing from their homes every night to escape being abducted into the Army. An organization was started called The Invisible Children, Inc. In fact, you can find out more information about this at this website:

[www.invisiblechildren.com](http://www.invisiblechildren.com)

But Ben and Melissa not only have been involved with this organization, they along with a number of other couples in our church, have adopted children from overseas. Even though they had three of their own kids, they adopted two others who were stuck in an orphanage.

There are many people in our church who bring foster children into their homes.

There are folks in our church who are guardian ad litem to protect the interests of abused and neglected children in our community.

There are folks in our church who really understand what it means to value children because you value Jesus and they see in the weakest of children the way the Kingdom of God came through the weakness of Jesus.

How do we value children?

We value children by valuing marriage and family.

Here is what we read in Mark 10:13-16:

**Mark 10:13-16**

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

The context of Jesus' statement about children is a discussion by Jesus of marriage and divorce. We read in Mark 10:2-9 these words:

**Mark 10:2-9**

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied. 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." 5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. 6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

See, this whole teaching about valuing children has to be tied with our understanding of the permanency of marriage in the eyes of God. When we in

21<sup>st</sup> century America treat marriage as disposable, we treat children as disposable.

Now, there are lots of causes of divorce, and there are certainly reasons why, according to the Bible, divorce may be permitted by God. If your spouse commits adultery, if a person is abandoned by their mate, if a person is physically abused by their spouse – then there is permission for divorce. And it is certainly the case that marriages in 21<sup>st</sup> century America are harder to hold together. Never in history have we expected so much out of marriage and provided so little resource to sustain marriage. People look to marriage now to meet all of their interpersonal needs. They expect their spouses to be their best friends; they expect a huge degree of intimacy, sharing and financial security and companionship and unconditional love and emotional support and personal fulfillment, and flaming hot romance.

We look to marriage for all of these needs, and yet in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, we resource marriage almost not at all. We pull away from couples all extended family. We separate husband and wife from the home. We send both traveling on business trips halfway around the globe. We hold up models of every other couple getting divorced and walking away from their vows. And then we say with these huge expectations, and this absolute poverty of resource, hold it together based on sheer determination.

Jesus tells us that our marriages are not disposable. He tells us that whatever reason we're offering for our divorce – a lack of compatibility, a lack of respect for each other, sexual problems, financial problems, in-law problems, fighting, and tension – all of these things are but symptoms of a deeper problem. Jesus goes to the heart of the problem in marriage by pointing to our hardness of heart. He says in Mark 10:5:

**Mark 10:5**

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.

These were hard words, indeed, from Jesus unless Jesus was coming to bring a kingdom that would offer a cure for our hard heartedness. To tell people that they have to stay together even though they are miserable is incredibly unloving unless Jesus came to bring about a cure for why we are so miserable.

Well, that is precisely what Jesus came to do – to heal the heart of a husband; to heal the heart of a wife. Hard heartedness is nothing other than having a heart that is out of tune with God's intention and God's plan for your life and for your family. Having a heart that wants something other than what God wants, having a heart that wants less than the best for yourself, having a heart that wants less than God's job, less than God's peace, less than God's love.

And friend, all of this ties into valuing children. Because divorce sets off an atomic bomb not only in the devastating impact on the people who get divorced. Divorce is devastating for husbands and wives. But divorce sets off an atomic bomb in the lives of children. I know this because my parents got divorced and the crater that my parent's divorce left in my life was enormous.

When I was 14 my parents got divorced and everything in my world immediately changed. Before their divorce, I was going to a suburban middle school. I was just finishing up 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I was at the very top of the school academically. Every one of my classes was an honors class. I was a year ahead in several subjects. I was on the wrestling team. I served in a variety of activities. I never smoked, drank, or used drugs.

And then their divorce exploded my world. They didn't ask me what I thought, or where I wanted to live. But I was suddenly yanked into an entirely new school system, pulled into a huge NYC high school that was on triple-sessions. I was stuck in an apartment an hour away from all of my old friends. I was excluded from all of the honor classes I had been in because the school didn't admit kids from other schools to honor classes. I couldn't wrestle because I got out of school at 5:30pm. I was separated from my dad.

There really is something about holding marriages together for the sake of children. And we do so much here to try to assist people in their marriages. That is why we are having a marriage conference soon. That is why we do so much investment in premarital counseling and premarital mentoring to prepare people for marriage. That is why we have so many marriage mentors. That is why we do a Begin Again program for couples who might be contemplating divorce.

Last thought. We value children by valuing children's relationship with Jesus.

We value children by valuing children's relationship with Jesus.

### **Mark 10:13-16**

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Jesus says, "Let little children come to me." How do we let kids come to Jesus? The statistics are clear that if a person doesn't make a decision for Christ by age 19, it is highly unlikely that they will ever make a decision for Christ in the rest of their lives. America teaches people that you don't want to impose your values or your faith upon your children. You need to let them search out their own paths,

explore what is right for them. America says to offer your children very little spiritual guidance.

I'm not into shoving religion down our children's throats. Certainly, lots of kids have been turned off in fundamentalist homes because there was no room for discussion, no room for debate, no room for questions. But the Bible speaks about handing our faith off to our kids by lovingly permeating their lives with continual communication about God and his will. We read in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 these words:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

I especially love verse 7:

Deuteronomy 6:7

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

It is great child raising counsel. Talk to your children from God's Word inside the house and outside; at the beginning of the day and at the end. Saturate your children's lives with Jesus. Model Jesus for them. Let them see you privately worshipping Jesus. Let them see you privately reading God's Word. Teach your children to pray.

A child is never too young to be brought to Jesus. And Jesus gets indignant; he gets angry when we have the mindset that our children are too young to pray, or too young to receive Jesus into their lives. Maybe they will be manipulated. We are so afraid that they could be molded too easily.

The Bible does not share our contemporary fears. Permeate your kids' lives with Jesus. Bring your kids to Jesus by praying for them. And one thing I think we can do a better job of as a church is valuing children by including kids, especially in more family-friendly small groups. I would love to see dozens and dozens of parents say: We are going to strategize a way to incorporate our kids into small group life. Maybe by doing a family style dinner once a month together. By serving with your children down at Fruit of the Vine. Serving in the community center along with your kids in a sports league. Having your teenager assist you in teaching at children's ministry, or in serving on our children's worship team.

## **Building a Church That Values Children**

---

Rich Nathan

April 28-29, 2007

Building a Church for Others Series

Mark 9:33-37; 10:1-16

### **I. The Challenges Facing Children In America**

### **II. The Devaluation Of Children In America**

- A. The Hurried Child
- B. The Inconvenient Child
- C. The Abused Child
- D. The "Normal" Child

### **III. The Ways That We Can Learn To Value Children**

- A. We Value Children By Valuing Jesus  
(Mark 9:33-37)
  - 1. Redefining Greatness
  - 2. Welcoming The Least
- B. We Value Children By Valuing Marriage and Family  
(Mark 10:1-12)
- C. We Value Children By Valuing Children's Relationship With Jesus (Mark 10:13-16)
  - 1. Praying For Our Children
  - 2. Passing On The Faith