

We are currently walking through the Gospel of Matthew and in chapters 18 and 19 we have been in a series on the need for reeducation in Kingdom values. Jesus brought the Kingdom in his first coming, and we are to put that rule into effect and we show the world what it looks like to be a forgiven people living under the good rule of our great high king. Our values are not the values of the world. It is an upside-down Kingdom characterized by paradoxical values. We have looked at marriage, and divorce, singleness, dating, and today we turn to children.

Turn to **Matt 19:13-15 (774)** – Someone brings some children to Jesus. They are brought to him. These are likely infants or very small children. Mark's gospel says that Jesus took them in his arms. Jesus must have had a reputation and a disposition that showed that he was one who welcomed children.

Well, the disciples are out of line with Jesus once again. Their minds are on earthly things, not the things of the Kingdom. The disciples rebuke the people. "Jesus is too important for your children!" They scolded these parents for bothering the Lord with such insignificant little people. Remove those nuisances from the presence of the Messiah.

Now, lest we be too harsh on the disciples, we need to know that in the ancient mindset, children were not esteemed. In ancient Rome, infants were abandoned with regularity. They called it exposure. And one of the marks of the Christian church is that they rescued these abandoned babies. Also, in the ancient world, children were not part of a man's work.

Well, how does the King of the world reply? Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. And he lays his hands on them and went away. Mark's account says Jesus was indignant with the disciples. You don't get what I am about, do you? You are thinking about a worldly kingdom, not my kingdom. Yes I am busy saving the world. What you miss is the main way I am saving the world – is through children.

What does Jesus mean that the Kingdom belongs to children like these? Remember ch. 18? Feels like months ago. **18:1-4**. The ancient world didn't have a high view of kids and they were the most powerless members of society. Jesus is saying that greatness in the Kingdom comes, not by selfish ambition and the desire to have power and be known, but by taking the position in the social scale of children. They are lowest on the totem pole, bottom of the pecking order. The Kingdom belongs to those who take the low social status, the lowly position. Weak, dependent, vulnerable, unable, passive – those the world disqualifies or dismisses. The values of the upside-down Kingdom are counterintuitive and greatness in the Kingdom requires the path of downward mobility.

You think you are too great for children, you are defining greatness wrongly. *This* is greatness. Jesus values children therefore we must value children. **18:5-6**. Whoever welcomes a child welcomes Jesus. To be Christ-like is to be pro-children. Or as CSL says, children are not a distraction from more important work; they are the most important work.

So, what does this mean for the church today? Well, we are pro-children. And if we are not, the main call of the Christian life is to be conformed to Christ, made like Jesus. And he was clearly pro-children. Let them come and do not hinder them. And I think we have that right around here, but it's also good to remind ourselves that this is not the norm out there. I read this week that there are now more dogs in the U.S. than children under 18. 76M dogs, and 73M young people. Over 38% of homes have at least one dog and 30% of households have

at least one child.<sup>1</sup> So, to have a bunch of kids running around is not the norm, even in churches. When guests or friends come through, they typically comment on two things (never the preaching). But they are struck by how strong you sing, and how many children we have. Btw, speaking of running around. We really need to tone that down a bit so talk to your young ones. The last thing we want is one of our seniors getting chopped at the knee, so let's improve on that.

So, we are pro-children. Listen to J.C. Ryle: "Let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of children. Let us begin from their earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost or saved, and let us strive to bring them to Christ; let us make them acquainted with the Bible, as soon as they can understand anything; let us pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray for themselves. We may rest assured that Jesus looks with pleasure on such endeavours, and is ready to bless them: we may rest assured that such endeavours are not in vain. The seed sown in infancy, is often found after many days. Happy is that church whose infant members are cared for as much as the oldest communicants! The blessing of him that was crucified will surely be on that church! He 'put his hands' on little children: he prayed for them."<sup>2</sup>

We are pro-kids. We focus and prioritize raising up the next generation. **Ps 127:3-5**. Children are an inheritance, a heritage, a reward. They are like arrows. They are useful. Arrows are weapons for warfare. Arrows in the hand of a warrior. Blessed is the man with a quiver full. **128**: the wife of the godly man is like a fruitful vine, a bringer of joy like wine and the mother of children. Kids are like shoots around your table, full of energy and potential. They must be nourished, weeded, pruned. Olive shoots produced wood, food, oil. May you see your children's children. Prov 17:6: Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers."

If you are married and able, have kids. As many as you can. Married believers should not choose to remain childless deliberately and permanently unless there is some clear infirmity or unusual circumstance. Listen to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Protestants and Catholics agree on this or used to anyway): "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."<sup>3</sup> The crowning glory of marriage is children. The main purpose of marriage is procreation. If you have kids and you are wondering if you should have more or not, I say just round up. If you are thinking 3 or 4, go 4. I am hesitant to say that because the nursery is overflowing. In Scripture, the average household had 6.1 kids.<sup>4</sup> I am just describing, not prescribing. In 2020, 1.6 kids per household. It needs to be 2.1 for the modern population to replace itself. You know what the birth rate is in Afghanistan? 4.2.<sup>5</sup> So have kids if married and able. If not able, I will mention the option of fostering in a minute.

In a blog post about how fast the culture has turned against a biblical sexual ethic, Pastor Kevin DeYoung offers a retrieval of the old culture war strategy: "I am grateful for serious Christians involved in the political arena.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> Ryle 190.

<sup>3</sup> Ayers, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 92.

<sup>5</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?end=2020&start=1960&view=chart>

What happens in D.C. matters. Elections have consequences. But families have more. To marshal our energies as if political victories were more important than strengthening the family is a decidedly un-conservative position. I'm not calling for abandoning politics, but I am asking the question, "What does it profit a man if he gets textualists on the Supreme Court but loses his own children?" Here's a culture war strategy conservative Christians should get behind: have more children and disciple them like crazy. Strongly consider having more children than you think you can handle. You don't have to be a fertility maximalist to recognize that children are always lauded as a blessing in the Bible. . . . Do you want to rebel against the status quo? Do you want people to ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15)? Tote your brood of children through Target. There is almost nothing more counter-cultural than having more children. And once we have those children, there is almost nothing more important than catechizing them in the faith, developing their moral framework, and preparing them to be deeply compassionate lovers of God and lovers of people and relentlessly biblical lovers of truth. I understand that being a good parent does not guarantee believing children. I understand that many couples will be unable to have all the children they want to have. We have to allow for God to work in mysterious ways that we would not have planned. And yet, in so far as we are able, let us welcome new life and give our children that best opportunity for new birth. Presidents and Supreme Court justices will come and go. A child's soul will last forever. The future belongs to the fecund (feck und). It's time for happy warriors who seek to "renew the city" and "win the culture war" by investing in their local church, focusing on the family, and bringing the kingdom to bear on the world, one baby at a time."<sup>6</sup>

Marriage is for babies. We make love, God makes life. In one of the most explosive and pleasurable acts ever created, God creates a new eternal soul. Amazing. It is the first command. Be fruitful, multiply, rule the world on God's behalf. Mal 2:15: "Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union." God is seeking godly offspring through the marriages of God-fearing people. This is his main way of expanding the Kingdom. Luther said, "This at least all married people should know. They can do no better work and do nothing more valuable either for God, for Christendom, for all the world, for themselves, and for their children than to bring up their children well."

How else can we be like Christ when it comes to babies? What are the implications for Jesus' view of children and **abortion**? Well, crystal clear. Or it least it should be. Abortion is in the news more than ever and is one of the greatest blind spots in America today. 60M babies have been aborted in this country, which is 4x the combined population of NYC, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The annual abortion count is just under 620,000 lives a year. In 2014, there were 900K. Abortion is the 5th leading cause of maternal death in the US. Post-abortive women have higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and are more likely to seek counseling or hospitalization for depression, which is why we are so thankful for the overturning of Roe recently, but the battle is not over.

The left has gone mad on this issue. One used to could find pro-life Democrats, but those days are over. Right now, there are even Democratic lawmakers pressuring Google to prevent crisis pregnancy centers from showing up in search results and Google Ads and Google Maps.<sup>7</sup> Simply incredible. Utterly evil. They claim that pro-life pregnancy centers are "fake clinics that traffic in misinformation" and don't provide comprehensive health services. They mean they won't kill the baby. These Democrats also argue that pro-life pregnancy clinics are "dangerous to women's health" and their appearance in search results "undermines the integrity of

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/its-time-for-a-new-culture-war-strategy/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.christianpost.com/news/republican-attorneys-general-warn-google-dont-censor-pro-life-pregnancy-centers.html>

Google's search results." They don't actually care about women. They are not actually pro-choice, they are no choice but abortion.

Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren recently went off on pregnancy resource centers. She said, "Crisis pregnancy centers that are there to fool people looking for pregnancy termination help outnumber true abortion clinics by 3-1. We need to shut them down here in Massachusetts and we need to shut them down all around the country."<sup>8</sup> Just wicked. And this culture of death has infiltrated liberal churches. Listen to this from the Episcopalian church: "Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 80th General Convention denounces the work of Crisis Pregnancy Centers, also known as Pregnancy Resource Centers; and be it further resolved, that the 80th General Convention apologizes for the Church's previous support of Crisis Pregnancy Centers as detailed in Resolution 1994-D105."<sup>9</sup> Proverbs says those who hate wisdom love death.

When in reality, PRC's are doing some of the most significant ministry out there. And they are going to need our help in a post-Roe world. Last year (2021), over 3,000 Crisis Pregnancy Centers in the U.S. provided 486,213 free ultrasounds, 731,884 free pregnancy tests, and 967,251 free consultations with new clients.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes I think we can hear and agree on the atrocities of abortion and feel helpless. What can I do to care for the least of these? I am glad you asked. Four options. First, vote. Did you know that the state of Texas is 56-58% pro-choice? Did you know that Abilene is 54% pro-choice? You say, no way. I said the same thing. The reality is that Abilene is 88% pro-life, but the pro-life people don't get off their tail and go vote. This November, vote for life. There will be an ordinance come to ballot to make Abilene a sanctuary city for the unborn. You may say, no need – we just overturned Roe and Abilene doesn't have an abortion clinic. You are right and this will ensure we never do. Early voting begins Oct 24<sup>th</sup> and election day is Nov 8.

Second, get involved in foster care. Abilene has a huge need. And there are several ways you can serve neglected or abandoned children. You could obviously foster. We have several families doing it or in the process of getting trained. It is a precious, vital, hard ministry. If you are open to it, I encourage to take a next step. Begin training. The Lord will lead you as you learn. He doesn't steer parked cars. We partner with Foster 325, which helps members help those who are fostering. If you are ready to foster, we will have your back! See Melissa Harrell for more info or contact the office and we'll get you connected. Foster 325 is hosting a babysitter/respite class on Sept 10. Learn more at [Foster325.org/babysit](https://Foster325.org/babysit).

We also have sort of a temporary foster option with safe families. We mentioned this a few months ago. Safe families is where we care for a child for a short time to help Momma get back on her feet. The average stay is only 44 days and 70% of the kids are 5 or younger. We want to provide a wraparound team for the host family. So there are various roles: Host Families - Take in the kids on a temporary basis. Family Friends - Provide support for the host family. Resource friends - provide resources for the host family or family in need. A Family coach - Come along side and coach the family in need. Email [Taylor@ssbaptist.org](mailto:Taylor@ssbaptist.org).

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<sup>8</sup> [https://twitter.com/greg\\_price11/status/1546957961439969280](https://twitter.com/greg_price11/status/1546957961439969280)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.vbinder.net/resolutions/318/original\\_text?house=HD&lang=en](https://www.vbinder.net/resolutions/318/original_text?house=HD&lang=en)

<sup>10</sup> <https://lozierinstitute.org/fact-sheet-pregnancy-centers-serving-women-and-saving-lives-2020/>

All believers are called to this work in some way. James 1:27: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

A third way to get involved is to serve at our local PRC. We support them monthly as a church so your giving to us supports them but they are also regularly in need of volunteers, counselors, and resources. Specifically, currently they need: Size 4,5,6, diapers. They also need these formulas: Similac Advanced, Similac Sensitive, Enfamil Gentlease. They are doing great work over there and we want to help them keep it up. Just last month, 8 ladies came in considering abortion and 5 chose life. Last month they did 122 pregnancy tests, 40 ultrasounds, and gave out 236 baby supplies. PRABilene.com.

A 4<sup>th</sup> way is to advocate for life. Due to medical technology, the debate has changed. We all now know that life begins at conception. A recent dissertation surveyed almost 6K biologists and 96% affirmed the view that a human life begins at fertilization.<sup>11</sup> Now, the media doesn't want you knowing that sort of thing. Scott Klusendorf has done some wonderful work on apologetics here.<sup>12</sup> The argument goes like this: Premise #1: It is wrong to intentionally kill innocent human beings. Premise #2: Abortion intentionally kills innocent human beings. Conclusion: Therefore, abortion is morally wrong. That simple. We can show from science that the unborn are distinct (diff in kind from any cell of parents), living (react, convert food to energy, grow)), and whole human beings (they come from humans have a human make up and are fully programmed. You didn't come *from* an embryo; you once *were* an embryo.

We argue from philosophy that there is no relevant difference between *you the embryo* and *you the adult* that justifies killing you at that earlier stage of development. Think of SLED: Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you could be killed then but not now.

Besides fighting for life, what are some other ways to adopt Jesus' attitude towards kids? Serve with House of Faith, a local neighborhood ministry that seeks to care and teach kids, most of whom come from broken homes. Reach out to us and we'll connect you to Kristi Wilson.

You knew it was coming: serve in the nursery. If you are a member, and are good with kids, would you consider getting on a rotation? Reach out to Stephen White – [stephen@ssbaptist.org](mailto:stephen@ssbaptist.org). Serving on the nursery rotation is a great and needed way to be like Jesus, and to serve other families of South Side. Let's break the secular 80/20 rule – where 20% do 80% of the work. You know God is at work in a church, conforming to Christ, when there is a waiting line for the nursery. Or if you want to teach or sub or anything like that, hit Stephen up. Here is Stephen's plug: "if you have ever prayed for more patience, more self-control, more joy and laughter in your life, then God is handing you an opportunity to cultivate all of that in one place, the nursery!"

Closer to home, if you have children, bring them to Jesus. Disciple them. Make your life aim their discipleship. Give yourself fully to it. This is your responsibility. Too many parents think it is the church's job to disciple kids. We will do our best to steward the little time we have with them, but I just need to be honest with you: if you are relying on us to disciple your kids, we will utterly fail you.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://quillette.com/2019/10/16/i-asked-thousands-of-biologists-when-life-begins-the-answer-wasnt-popular/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://prolifetraining.com/pro-lifer/how-to-defend-your-pro-life-views-in-5-minutes-or-less/>

You know, the consistent stats are that 70+% of kids raised in Evangelical homes leave the church when they leave the home. The truth is, they never had the faith in most cases. Too many parents have thought that 30 min a week of flannel graph was enough to push back against thousands and thousands of hours of secular discipleship. We haven't taken our enemy seriously enough. The world, the flesh, and the devil are against us and our kids.

Satan is the father of lies and his native language is lies. So we have to be aware of the lies coming to our kids. We have to be aware of the ways they come to our kids. How? Mainly through technology, school curriculum, teachers, and peers. Listen to Col 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." Parents must be awake today. The world is discipling us. Neutrality is a myth. As Lewis said every square inch is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan. How can you disciple them? Family worship and corporate worship.

Practice family worship at home. J.C. Ryle, said, "Fathers and mothers, you may take your children to be baptized, and have them enrolled in the ranks of Christ's Church; you may get godly sponsors to answer for them, and help you by their prayers; you may send them to the best of schools, and give them Bibles and Prayer Books, and fill them with head knowledge: - but if all this time there is no regular *training at home*, I tell you plainly, I fear it will go hard in the end with your children's souls. Home is the place where habits are formed; home is the place where the foundations of character are laid; home gives the bias to our tastes, and likings, and opinions. See then, I pray you, that there be careful training at home. Happy indeed is the man who can say, as Bolton did upon his dying bed, to his children, 'I do believe not one of you will dare to meet me before the tribunal of Christ in an unregenerate state.'"<sup>13</sup>

Dads, you are called to lead out in this. Men, you are called to lead the home spiritually. Moms, if you are single, or your husband is not a believer, you step up and lead, but for homes with believing Dads, God calls men to lead out in this. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Fathers, God calls you to lead in bringing up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. / Read, sing, pray – every night at dinner, or every morning at breakfast, or every bedtime. Read a Bible story book, read a few verses, catechize them, sing a song we'll sing on Sunday (it is in the weekly email and on Fb), and pray.

**Deut 6:7-9** the job description for Christian parents. Saturate your home with the Word. Spurgeon says, "I agree with Matthew Henry when he says, 'They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray and read, and sing do best of all.'"<sup>14</sup>

Bring them to corporate worship. We are distinct nowadays in that we want our children in here in corporate worship with their parents. As Al Mohler says, one of the scandals of Evangelicalism is that we send people to their rooms as soon as we get to church. Our kids are functionally brought up "unchurched."

At South Side, we intentionally do not offer "children's church" during our main corporate church service for children 3 years or older. We do offer age-appropriate Bible study at 9am for children, but we want them and

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<sup>13</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents* (Grace and Truth: Sand Springs, OK, 1888), 32-33

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

welcome them in the service with their families. We welcome the squirms, and wiggles and giggles. Please do take them to the restroom before service, but we get it. Kids in here is a big deal for us. We want them hearing and participating as we sing the Word, pray the Word, preach the Word and see the Word displayed and obeyed in communion and baptism.

it is the biblical pattern. Everywhere in Scripture it is assumed that children were a part of the gathered congregation. In Joshua 8:35, we read that Joshua read the Law “before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones.” Joel 2:15-16 says, “Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants.” In Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20, the Spirit through the Apostle Paul addresses children directly. Clearly, there was no “children’s church” in the mind of the Apostle. They were to be present with their families gathered with the people of God.

It takes some time, but kids adjust fast. Sunday morning church begins on Saturday night. Plan clothing, breakfast, read the passage, and sing the songs and you’ll come in ready and ripe. The cumulative effect of biblical sermons and gospel-centered songs over the years is incalculable. A child who grows up at South Side Baptist Church will sit in some 900 corporate worship services. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Rom 10:17). If you are doing family worship at home, then there will be a continuity between the home and church as there should be. Jonathan Edwards said, “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church.”