

Family Values

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Family Mess 2 Series

1 Samuel 1

One of the best things that you discover when you pick up a Bible and start to read it from the beginning is how different the view of human life is in the Bible from the way that we think about how to do life in 21st century America. In America our approach to life as been called:

Expressive individualism

The fundamental questions that we ask about life are things like: Am I happy? Am I personally satisfied with my job, with my church, with my marriage? Am I fulfilled? If you read articles in women's magazines about marriage and about relationships, as I do all the time, the themes that emerge – I actually read this from a study and not from my personal reading of Cosmo, Redbook or O – what you will find is that the basic relational advice is all around the individual and the individual's personal fulfillment, their personal independence. One researcher said that as she looked at relational advice from women's magazines in the 1970's and compared the advice to women's magazines in the 21st century; you have a major shift from an emphasis on "we" to an emphasis to "me."

Life is not about "we" in 21st century America. We the people of the United States...we the church...we in our marriages. Life is about me.

You see this expressive individualism when relationships break down. The counsel given to the unhappy woman or the unhappy man is that you owe it to yourself; you actually have a duty to yourself, to find happiness. The old ethic was even if you are unhappy; if you are not being abused, but you are unhappy or unfulfilled in your marriage, stay in your marriage for the sake of the children. The new ethic is that's ridiculous. You owe it to yourself to be happy, and if you are happy, your children will be happy.

The Bible starts in a totally different place. If you open up the Bible and start reading from the beginning, you will find that in the Bible the starting point for thinking about how to do life is we, not me. The Bible begins with the family as the central context for doing life. And this social view of the family gets extended in the Bible into our relationship with God where God is our Father, Christ our older Brother, and the church is our extended family.

So when you read the Bible from the beginning and you start in the book of Genesis, you discover that the primary sphere of God's activity is not the nation, it's not the government; the primary sphere of God's activity is the family. And the really important events in life don't happen where we say they happen in the 21st century. The really important things are happening in the courts. They're happening on the battlefields. They're happening in Washington. When you read the book of Genesis, the really important things are happening in the family.

And even as you move out of the book of Genesis and God starts dealing with the nation of Israel, the leaders of Israel are not just national leaders, governmental leaders, these individuals are also part of families. So Moses is not only a leader, he is also a brother and husband and a father. King David, the greatest of the Old Testament kings, is not just a king, but he is a son and a brother, and a husband and a father. The family is central to the story of human beings in the Bible.

Now, the Bible doesn't simply portray family life as idyllic, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, because by the time you get to the 4th chapter of the Bible, Genesis 4, we read a very negative story of a family that is at odds with itself when Adam and Eve begin to have children. In the material that we're going to be going through in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings we'll not only be discussing family as the context in which people do life, but family as deeply flawed and often the setting of great personal wounding and hurt.

What we discover in the Bible is a challenge, a confrontation, between the way God intends for us to do life and the way that culture tells us to do life. There is a great challenge in the Bible, whether it is to the ancient Near Eastern culture, in which the Bible was written, or the Greco Roman culture in which the 1st century New Testament was written, or the culture we live in in the 21st century Western world. There is a challenge, a confrontation, with the values that the larger culture teaches.

Today I'm starting a new series that I've titled Family Mess 2. I did a series on Family Mess from the book of Genesis a few years ago. And I want to continue with the theme of Family Mess by looking a few other historical books from the Old Testament. I've called today's message, Family Values. Let's pray.

I'm going to read an extended portion this morning of the opening chapter in the book of 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel 1:1-20

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine." "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

Now the books that we call 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book – at least at the time that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in what was called the Septuagint which was written a couple of centuries before the birth of Christ. The one book was originally called The Book of the Kingdoms. And then the one book was cut up into four parts that we now know today as 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings over the following centuries. But it is almost certainly the case that Samuel did not write the books that carry his name – 1 and 2 Samuel – because his death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25.

But even if Samuel's connection with the book that bears his name is not by way of authorship, Samuel had a mammoth spiritual influence over his own generation and the

generations that came after him. The prophets considered the great leaders of Israel to be Moses and Samuel. Here is what we read in Jeremiah 15:1:

Jeremiah 15:1

Then the Lord said to me: “Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!

Samuel bridges the transition of Israel as a confederacy of tribes in the days of the Judges to Israel as a monarchy. And he bridges the time where the priests are the primary religious figures to the time where the prophets are the primary religious figures in the nation.

So as we read the opening of 1 Samuel 1, we’re probably somewhere around 1050 BC. Here is what we read in v. 1:

1 Samuel 1:1

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.

As we consider the names in this genealogy the first thing we see is that:

Our value is not tied to our recognition

V.1 introduces us to Samuel’s father, Elkanah, whose family tree is traced quickly back through four generations of people from the Israelite tribe of Ephraim. As one commentator said: The names in Elkanah’s genealogy are important because of their utter unimportance.

The Bible is largely a story of very obscure people – folks who only very occasionally show up in other histories of the world. Yes, we can by examining other histories, other records of the ancient Near East come upon the occasional name of an Israelite king that confirms and corroborates the Old Testament. But by and large the Bible is God’s record of very obscure people. God recognizes people that the rest of the world doesn’t recognize.

It is interesting how history plays out in terms of who gets recognized at certain times and who doesn’t. There are so many who live lives as almost complete obscurity in their own day who are now considered to be major cultural forces and contributors to the world’s great art or music or poetry. So many artists and musicians and writers toiled in complete obscurity – folks like Van Gogh.

Picture of Van Gogh’s self-portrait

When Van Gogh died he left the world with almost 2000 of his creations, virtually all of which were completely unappreciated in his day. I think he sold one painting in his life.

I think of the composer Franz Schubert, who like Van Gogh, was incredibly prolific in a very short life. Schubert died at age 31. But in his own day he was considered a very minor composer. You might know him today as the composer of Ave Maria which is sung in many churches at Christmas. It's not a bad little number.

There is the poet Emily Dickinson, who spent much of her adult life as a hermit. Dickinson was dismissed in her day as an eccentric woman, who spent most of her time working in her garden, writing poems, very few of which were published during her own life. She became one of America's most loved poets.

Edgar Allan Poe died penniless and as an alcoholic.

But it is not only who we are that goes unrecognized, but often our accomplishments are not valued by anyone but God. Here is what we read in vv. 9-16:

1 Samuel 1:9-16

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine." "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli, the priest, utterly lacks spiritual discernment. Hannah was perceived by Eli to be a drunk woman as she muttered under her breath. The interesting thing was that in later Judaism the way Hannah whispered her prayer became the model for the way Jews today pray the central prayer of Judaism which is known as the Amidah Prayer of 18 Blessings. You pray it as a whisper.

Brothers and sisters, here is my point. The world gives great recognition to what matters not at all to God and doesn't even make a lasting contribution to cultural or human well being. And the things that matter enormously to God go utterly unrecognized by the rest of the world. The world pays attention to speeches and parades and aware

ceremonies and wealth and career success. The Bible pays attention to families. 21st century Americans pay no attention to families. The family matters to God. So many things we do goes unrecognized by the world, but they're noticed by Jesus. I think of Jesus standing in the Jewish Temple watching what people were giving into the temple's treasury. And of course Jesus watches today what we give. All the wealthy were putting in their big gifts into the temple treasury and were being celebrated. And then there is this poor, obscure widow, who catches Jesus' eye as she put in two little copper coins. Jesus says:

Luke 21:3-4

"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Our value is not tied to our recognition. The value of what we do is not tied to the recognition in the world. The world values big and fast and loud – the pushers, the movers and shakers, the self-promotional. There are saints working around the world, toiling in obscurity in Muslim countries, in situations of great hardships. Few people know their names, but Jesus knows their name and cheers for them!

Our value is not tied to what we have

1 Samuel 1:2

He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Hannah does not have children; Peninnah does. Clearly Hannah, whose name means "grace" is being tested. In America today people think their personal worth is tied to their net worth. I read this ad in a magazine:

His suits are custom-tailored. His watch is solid gold. His office chair is...

And then they had this company name. Here is what the guy in the ad was supposedly saying:

I work hard and had my share of luck. My business is a success. I want my office to reflect this, and I think it does. For my chair I chose [this particular company; I don't recall the name]. If you can't say that about your office chair, isn't it time you bought X? After all, you are worth it.

See, the only way you are worthy of sitting in a chair like the chair this company was selling is if you have really made it; if you are a valuable person. If you are poor, sit on a box, sit on the floor.

Everything about America tells us that our value is measured by what we have. Do you have a spouse? Do you have a great car? Do you have a child? Do you have a great job? What we have, not who we are - your career, not your character; your possessions, not your person.

But you look at these two women and we discover something about how God evaluates them. Hannah, as I said, means “grace” or “gracious one.” Peninnah means “fertile.” Peninnah was the fertile one, the one who was able to bear children. What matters is not what we are by way of nature, but what we are by way of grace. What matters is not what we are by way of creation, our talents, our intelligence, our looks, our ability to bear children, or not. What matters ultimately is what we are by way of grace. You may have this natural temperament, these natural skills, a particular body type. You are not going to be rewarded because of what you are by way of nature or creation. The reward to you will come by what you are as a matter of grace; how have you allowed God to transform your life now that Christ has gotten hold of you? It is not your birth, it is your second birth that matters in the sight of God.

Here is what the Apostle Paul says about his own personal identity.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Friends, let me ask you a question. If you are a follower of Christ, how do you evaluate yourself and what really matters in your life. Is it how much recognition you’re gotten, or what you have by way of your possessions, or your natural talents? Or do you evaluate yourself according to the mind of God and say: You know what really matters in my life is the way that I’ve been changed, the way that I’ve been transformed since Christ got a hold of me. What really matters is the grace of God that has been at work to me and through me towards the world. By the grace of God, I am what I am, Paul says. What matters is the grace you have received and the grace you are giving away.

1 Samuel 1:3-5

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.

Our value is not tied to what God permits

Now, listen, God often permits tremendous pain to come into individual's lives. And the distribution of pain in this world doesn't seem to be even. Some families experience enormous pain, terrible trials, and other families seem to get off relatively scott free. There is pain in everyone's life, of course. You can't go through this broken world without some experience of pain and loss. But the severity of pain seems to be distributed unevenly. People wonder why God would permit so much suffering, if he loves me. We read in Hannah's life that Hannah, the one who was named "grace," who became a recipient of God's grace, had her womb closed by the Lord. We read in v. 5:

1 Samuel 1:5

But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.

As we wrestle with the mystery of suffering in the light of what God has revealed to us in the Bible and what God hasn't revealed, and there is much that God hasn't revealed, there are three things that Christians always need to hold on to:

- **God permits all that happens to us**

Everything that occurs to us is under the utter sovereignty of God. God permits all that happens to us. It doesn't mean that he does it to us; but, he does allow it to happen.

- All that happens to us is not God's ideal will

That's why we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Because the world and our own lives are not working the way that the world and our lives will work when only the will of Jesus is being done. Right now, there is the will of lots of other beings being done – other people are exercising their reign, we're exercising our reign, Satan is exercising his reign. One day there is only going to be one ruler, whose will will be done everywhere and all competing wills and all competing reigns will be destroyed. Here is what it says in 1 Corinthians 15:24-25:

1 Corinthians 15:24-25

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

And here is the third principle regarding God's will:

- **God will one day end all evil**

I've read the end of the story. The end of the story is there is no more turbulence in the world, no more evil, no more tears, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more cancer, and no more grief. God permits all that happens to happen. God's ideal will is

not being done right now. There are wills that are competing with the will of God. And one day God will defeat all evil; his will will be done perfectly.

So here is Hannah and she is suffering. She is suffering because she can't have a child. You may be suffering because you can't have a child. You are single and there is no opportunity for you to have a child. You're married and there is a fertility problem with you or your spouse. Or you are suffering because you or a loved one is sick or in prison, or going through some relational heartache. Notice here that Hannah's suffering is not tied to her character or her godliness. Year after year, it says, she went to the temple according to the Hebrew law to worship, to offer sacrifices. These were people who were obedient to God. And yet they suffered.

You ask: What do I get out of obeying God? Hannah had great character, but she had no children. The prosperity teaching that you hear blasted over the airways today will say the more godly you are, the more gold you have. The more you give, the more you get. But here Hannah is suffering even though she is godly. So the question must be asked, what do you get from obeying God, anyway?

You could say, of course, we need to obey God whether we get anything out of it or not. He is, after all, God. He made us. He is the Lord. But what do we get out of obeying?

Now, it really is the case that in the Old Testament as God was training the nation of Israel in godliness, obedience in different passages was linked to material blessing. But when we get to the New Testament, you virtually never see obedience linked to material blessing. So if God is not necessarily going to give you kids, if you obey him, or give you the job you want, if you obey him, or give you the bank account or the house you want, or the marriage partner you want, if you obey him, why should you obey him? What do you get out of it?

Here is what we read in Romans 6:21-22. Here is what you get out of obeying God:

Romans 6:21-22

What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Paul says that when you disobey God, it results in death. Not just physical death, death in the Bible was a comprehensive way to talk about alienation, separation, being cut off. When you disobey God, you get cut off from an experience of God. You find yourself far from God when you are sinning, when you disobey him. When you sin against another person, you find yourself alienated and cut off from this other person. You can't look them in the eye. You don't feel close to them. When you sin, when you disobey God, you feel cut off from yourself, you feel cut in half, you don't feel whole.

What do you get from obeying God? Romans 6:22:

Romans 6:22

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

What you get from obedience is you get to experience right now in this life the life of the age to come. Right now, you get to experience in your life the life that you will enjoy fully when the kingdom of this world is replaced by the kingdom of God. The life of the age to come is not Lexuses, jewels and pearls. It is love and joy and peace. Do you want to feel joy in your life? Obey God. Do you want to finally get some peace in the place of your anxiety? Obey God. Do you want to feel God's love? Obey him. What you want in your life? Do you want to experience the life of the age to come? Obey God now!

Our value is not tied to how our family treats us

1 Samuel 1:6-8

Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Hannah, the gracious one, is taunted by her rival, Peninnah and her husband is insensitive to her. A husband is not a replacement for having children. Only God can fill the hole that infertility brings to a woman.

Family in scripture is hugely important, but it is not the ultimate. Like everything else in the world, family is tainted by sin. And even in the best families with parents who both love God, love each other, and love their children – even in the best families, there are problems, heartache, competition and conflict, one child feels that they weren't as loved by their parents as the other child was; parents may have more in common with one child than another – they understand or "get" one child better than they "get" another; siblings will compete with one another. In the most godly families, there may be a child with a physical handicap; there may be a family member who struggles with mental illness – a family member dies as happened today with Rick Warren's 27-year old son this weekend.

Families in the Bible matter hugely. But ultimately, who you are is not what your family says about you, but what God says about you. That's why I love the Vineyard song titled "Your Beloved."

*Lord, who am I
Compared to Your glory?
Lord, who am I
Compared to Your majesty?*

*'Cause I'm Your beloved,
Your creation,
And You love me as I am.
You've called me, chosen
For Your kingdom.
Unashamed to call me Your own
I am Your beloved.*

Do you say that about yourself, friends? If you are in relationship with Christ, do you say “I’m the beloved of God” and “You, Lord, love me as I am?” That’s what makes you valuable, not what your family says or does.

Finally,

Children’s value is not tied to how our culture views them

1 Samuel 1:9-11

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

Their culture

Their culture said that children were of supreme importance. It was a terrible thing in the ancient Near East to not be able to bear a child. Being infertile, to be barren as a woman, was to be utterly desolate, to feel cursed, to feel rejected, to be nothing in that culture. A woman’s identity was wrapped up – and I would just note how many incredibly godly women in the Bible struggled with barrenness. Abraham’s wife, Sarah. Jacob’s wife, Rachel. Hannah, here. And Elizabeth in the New Testament. And for many of you – you’ve experienced the great pain of not being able to have a child.

Here is what Dr. King said in his sermon titled “Shattered Dreams” back in 1959.

...But notice what happened to this noble dream and this glowing hope that gripped Paul’s life. He never got to Rome in the sense he had hoped. He went

there only as a prisoner and not as a free man. He spent his days in that ancient city in a little prison cell, held captive because of his daring faith in Jesus Christ. Neither was Paul able to walk the dusty roads of Spain, nor see its curvaceous slopes, nor watch its busy coast life, because he died a martyrs' death in Rome. The story of Paul's life was the tragic story of a shattered dream and a blasted hope.

Life is full of this experience. There is hardly anyone here this morning who has not set out for some distant Spain, some momentous goal, some glorious realization, only to find out that we had to settle for so much less. We've never been able to walk as free men through the streets of our Rome. Instead, we were forced to live our lives in a little confining cell which circumstance had built around us. Life seems to have a fatal flaw, and history seems to have an irrational and unpredictable streak. Ultimately we will all die not having received what was promised. Our dreams are constantly tossed and blown by staggering winds of disappointment.

Every praying person has experienced the profound disappointment of prayers that have gone unanswered for years. Prayers for individuals that we've prayed a hundred, sometimes thousands, of times – the healing of a mate, the salvation of a child, the gift of a life partner.

Now in Hannah's life having a child was not an idol, even though having a child was hugely important to her. The culture told her that her worth was tied up in having a child. Nevertheless, her vow to the Lord in v. 11 is different than vows that we read in the rest of the Old Testament.

1 Samuel 1:11

And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Other vows that we read in the Old Testament go something like this: If you, God, give me such and such, then I will do so and so. Hannah's vow was different. Hannah's vow said, "If you, God, give me such and such, I will give you back such and such." To put it a little differently, the other vows say, "God, if you give me x, I will do y." Hannah said, "If you give me X, if you give me a child, I will give you the child back. I don't want this child for myself, I want this child for your service. God, you give me this gift, and I'm going to give the gift back to you."

That's a good way to pray.

Their culture valued children.

Our culture

Our culture has become more and more like the Greco-Roman culture that existed before Christianity came into the world. I just finished a fascinating book titled When Children Became People by a man named O.M. Bakke.

Bakke writes about the situation of children in the Greco-Roman world before Christianity exercised its influence. In the Greco-Roman world fathers had the right to kill their children up until the child was 8 days old. Children were often put out in the cold to be exposed to the elements, or killed by wild animals. Sometimes adults would find them and the children would be raised to be slaves or traded into prostitution. This was especially so for baby girls, or for children with disabilities. But in many poor families, a father would deliberately kill an infant because it was just another mouth to feed. Abortion was rampant in the Greco-Roman world especially among wealthy women. And in the Greco-Roman world children were seen as appropriate objects of the sexual activity of adults. Adult men, including Greek philosophers, had sex with young boys and young girls.

Then, because of Christian influence, children became people. And the early church taught people to not kill their babies, and to not have abortions, and to not have sex with children. That was the influence of Christianity.

As Christianity recedes in influence in 21st century America, there is a massive devaluation of children. The old Greco-Roman culture is reasserting itself. Yes, we still have helicopter parents, who are hovering over their kids. And we have some families what are utterly kid-centered. But there is no doubt in so many ways that America today is increasingly kid-unfriendly. We live in a country that in an increasing way devalues children.

Look at media as it has evolved over the last 40 years. 40 years ago virtually every popular show on TV had children in it. Children were central. Now, almost all popular TV shows are about the lives of adults. Children are rarely seen on most popular TV shows except on Modern Family. And of course, media teaches kids today horrible values in its sex-saturated innuendo-laden jokes.

But the devaluation of kids goes way beyond media and media portrayals. In 1976 only one out of ten women over the age of 40 didn't have a child. Now one out of five women over the age of 40 don't have a child. In 1990 the most common household in America was a married couple with children. Now the most common household in America is a couple without children. Not only are fewer adults having children, but fewer adults in America don't want children.

There was a survey done of the Wharton School of Business just this past year. As compared with 20 years ago, Wharton grads were significantly less likely to expect to have children than Wharton grads were back in 1992. The number of men and women who answered “yes” to the question: “Do you expect to have children?” fell by half. In 1992 80% of Wharton male and female graduates expected to have kids. Today the number is 42%. The reason stated by students regarding why they don’t want to have Kids: kids get in the way of their careers. Kids cost a lot of money.

We live in a culture that says having a child is not a key element to happiness; having a lot of stuff and a great career is the way to be happy.

The American workplace devalues children. More and more jobs require 55, 60 or more hours a week. So what if you have kids? That’s your problem. You’re hired to do a job. And if you won’t put in the hours, we’ll find someone to replace you. America is the only industrialized country in the world, the only one, that does not mandate paid family leave when a pregnant woman delivers a baby. We’re in a category of 1 in not giving women paid leave when they deliver a baby. Our pregnancy leave policy in America is unpaid leave and only for big companies. American companies give no sick time to their employees to care for sick children.

We have the most liberal divorce laws in the world. Every European country just about says that if you have children, you cannot simply walk away from your marriage without cause. In Germany, if you have a child, there is a 3-year waiting period for divorce, if there is no cause for the divorce like abuse, adultery or addiction. In the United States, we say whether you have a child or not, if you are not happy, you can walk away.

We devalue children in so many ways in our country right now. We say social security, Medicare, that’s in a lock box. We’re not going to touch benefits for the elderly. Kids? Hey, kids, we just don’t have the money for you to have a music teacher, or an art teacher, or extracurricular activities. When we cut taxes, where do we cut? We cut schools. We don’t think it is immoral to presently consume, run up a national debt, and hand the bill to our children.

Friends, I tell you we live in an increasingly anti-child culture.

But here’s the good news. Jesus came. He died on a cross so that our sins could be forgiven and we could be reconciled to God. But before Jesus ascended into heaven, he left behind something he called the church which is to be an alternative society, an alternative culture, an alternative family in this world. We, friends, cannot promise everyone a marriage. But what we ought to offer to every single person, who is part of Vineyard Columbus is family – an alternative family, the experience of brothers and sisters, moms and dads, and children. Whether you are single or married, whatever your family background was, you ought to be able to experience family here. What it feels like when a family lives under the kingdom of God.

The church should reflect alternative values to the value system of the world. The world does not value kids, but the church should value children the way Jesus did because our Savior said:

Matthew 19:14

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Family Values

Rich Nathan

April 7, 2013

Family Mess 2 Series

1 Samuel 1

- I. Our value is not tied to our recognition
- II. Our value is not tied to what we have
- III. Our value is not tied to what God permits
- IV. Our value is not tied to how our family treats us
- V. Children's value is not tied to how our culture views them
 - A. Their culture
 - B. Our culture