

## “Who cares about kids?” Part 1 of the ‘Jesus Brings Real Relationships’ series

Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup> 2014. Rev. Bruce Stanley. [www.waitaraanglican.com.au](http://www.waitaraanglican.com.au)

### **Introduction:**

A young child sits on the floor of the church, before morning services begin. He has a ball. He’s rolling it around quietly on the carpet. A man walks up. “Excuse me” he says. You can’t play with that ball inside the church, because once someone did that, and one of our stained glass windows was broken, and it cost \$6000 to repair. But you can go outside with it and play. Just stay on the grass area and away from the windows.”

The child gets up, and walks outside.

15 minutes later, the church service begins. The children are there, singing and praying with the adults. Then it’s time for the kids’ activities. The same man from earlier says: “Now kids, it’s time for Sunday school. Now, let’s see if we can all walk *very quietly* out to the hall together. Shhhhh...”

The children leave quietly.

“Fair enough”, we might say. But the message of that Church morning to **me** was: “Kids, this is a grown up’s church. With grown up’s windows. And a grown up worship service. You’re a guest here. Not a member. You’re welcome to come, and we’ll run some activities for you, but you mustn’t interrupt the grown ups.”

What does God think of that?

In Deuteronomy 4, we hear God reminding the Israelites of his laws as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. He wants them to remember that the best life on earth for them is about living in obedience to Him. And not only do they need to **hear** these commands, and **remember** these commands, and **obey** these commands, but they’re also told to **TEACH** these commands to their children, and to their children’s children. Because teaching our children is essential for the life of the church, generation after generation. Children are **crucial** to our life and identity as a church.

But Deuteronomy was written in times when the family unit was HUGE! There were not only usually lots of children, but a household might have children, parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and next door were aunts and uncles and cousins. It was a TRIBAL community. Your family was your tribe. Often hundreds, if not thousands, of people. The family had the support of the tribe. So teaching their children the faith was the responsibility of a LARGE community.

Today, we cannot expect to leave the responsibility of teaching our children about Jesus to the **small** family units we have these days. Instead, we need to see this **Church** as our family. Our tribe. Our extended family. And although parents have the **key** responsibility for their own children, it is a responsibility they **share** with the church community.

Just think about our Church like a flock of sheep. In a flock you have some grandparent sheep, some parent sheep, and some baby lambs. Some sheep are older, some are younger. Some are wiser, some are not, some are weak, some are strong. The lambs, though, are completely dependent. They have little strength, but also little wisdom. They're learning how to survive. But they're vulnerable. They don't know how to defend themselves against wolves.

So, which sheep is the shepherd focused on? The old sheep? The parent sheep? The young sheep?

To the shepherd, every sheep is important. Equally important. But each one has different needs. And the lambs are especially vulnerable. They need MORE care. And even though the shepherd needs to take special care of the lambs, every sheep in the flock has a responsibility to care for the lambs, for the sake of the future of the flock.

This Church in Waitara has been around for over 60 years. And the only reason we are still here is because the truth of gospel of Jesus has been taught through the generations – because the lambs have been looked after. We have taught our kids about Jesus, generation after generation. In our homes, in our Sunday school, at Scripture, in our kids groups. We've invested in generational succession.

People often say to me things like: "It's great that we have so many children at our church. It's great to see the kids' ministry growing." And it IS great. Fantastic. Wonderful. But here's the problem. Often when we say "It's great" what we mean is simply: "It's a **nice thing** to have."

But our ministry to Children, to future generations, is core to the business of our faith. We MUST teach our children. God commanded us to do that. It's not a **nice** thing. It's not an **optional** thing. It's a MUST.

So how do we do it?

In our other reading from today, Proverbs 22:6 says:

**6** *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

It is important for us ALL to see this responsibility – of starting our children off on the way they should go. Whether we are praying for our children, or directly teaching them, or being a helper, or financially supporting this work, we all have a responsibility to start them off well.

But this verse from Proverbs is often used to guilt parents into thinking – “If you’re kids don’t grow up to be Christians, it’s YOUR fault. But let me say two things about this verse:

1. Proverbs is a book of “general truths”.

The things that are said here are **generally** true. They are wise sayings. But they are not ALWAYS true. For example, people say “There’s no such thing as a free lunch”. Now, that’s USUALLY true, but it’s not ALWAYS true! It’s a proverb.

There are always exceptions.

Same with children – kids can have great Christian parents, but turn away from God when they grow up, because they still have free choice. It’s GENERALLY true that teaching children in the faith well will set them on the best path. But there are exceptions.

Now, parents **do** need to take primary responsibility for the faith of their children. They need to SHOW their children their faith in the way they live. They must **pray** for their children, read the **Bible** with them, **teach** them God’s word (yes, parents need to do this!), being committed to bringing them to a **church family**. Parents hold a big responsibility. And if you’re not doing these basics, you need to start TODAY! BUT parents, you can’t do this alone. You need a community.

2. And that’s the second thing – It’s not just the **parent** who is the focus of this proverb. It’s the **Church community**.

Proverbs is written to the **community** of God’s people. It’s written to remind the **community** of the way we have been called to live. When we hear that we need to start children off on the way they should go, that’s a responsibility we ALL need to take on. That doesn’t mean parents can blame the church if their kids go off the rails. What it means is that we **all** work together to bring children up to follow Jesus, and we **all** grieve if a child grows up and turns away from God.

If we are mature Christians, we’ve **had** our good start. We need support to grow and be strengthened in our faith each week. But our kids, and their kids, need a good **start**, and that’s OUR responsibility as part of this Church family.

An American abolitionist named Frederick Douglass from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was quoted as saying:

*"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."*

In other words, it's easier to start them off well than to fix them up later. Just think of the problems us adults have today. How many of those problems do you think started in our childhood? Starting our children off well is a GOOD investment of our time and energy and ministry.

So how do we prepare our children? How do we care for them?

1. Take responsibility. We all need to take the responsible of passing on the gospel to the next generations. We are a Church family.
2. How do we do that? We can commit to praying for our children, and praying for our leaders. We can be a ministry helper, or a leader. We can train in child protection, train as a Scripture teacher, give financially to this ministry.
3. Finally, and most importantly perhaps, we can treat children as people who worthy of our love and attention. We can show our respect for them and serve them by putting their needs above our own. We can rejoice in the noise they make. We can give thanks for the spills on the carpet. We can praise God for the number of adults who exit each Sunday to teach our children as we are called to do. We can treat them as part of our family.

Do you know, there are people in our church, many are older members, some are not married, some don't have children, and I often see these people talking to our children. But what stops me in my tracks is that they're talking to them as people. As brothers and sisters. Not as "kids". They have conversations. They know their names, their football teams, remember their birthdays, take an interest in their hobbies. And when these people talk to our kids, in a very appropriate and caring way, what I notice is that they are talking to them with respect, as people of equal value. As brothers and sisters.

We are, as our verse over this stage says: "All one in Christ Jesus". We can't just **say** those words. We need to **believe** them, and really **mean** them. If we DO care about kids, then we will treat them as first class citizens of our church. Not as "a nice thing to have", or as a distraction, but as an essential part of who we are as the community of God's people. And remember this: without them, in only one generation, this Church could cease to exist.

So, "Who cares about children?"

Let's pray.

## Deuteronomy 4:1-14

**4** Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. **2** Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. **3** You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor. The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, **4** but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today. **5** See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. **6** Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." **7** What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? **8** And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? **9** Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. **10** Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children." **11** You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. **12** Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. **13** He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. **14** And the Lord directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

## Proverbs 22:1-16

**22** A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.  
**2** Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.  
**3** The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

- 4** Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life.
- 5** In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them.
- 6** Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.
- 7** The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.
- 8** Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken.
- 9** The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.
- 10** Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.
- 11** One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend.
- 12** The eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge, but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful.
- 13** The sluggard says, "There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!"
- 14** The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; a man who is under the Lord's wrath falls into it.
- 15** Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.
- 16** One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.