

How are we? Are we good? Excellent. If you have your Bible, even if you are one of our kids, let's head to the book of Colossians. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one around you. If you can read, grab one. We're going to be in the New Testament. My name is Pastor Matt. I'm the lead teaching pastor here at The Village. When you first- through fifth-graders are down the hall, I'm usually here with Mom and Dad teaching. We're glad you're with us today.

Let me just set some things out for everybody, because I think it'll be helpful as we get into today. If you're a first- through fifth-grader, I want you to look right at me right now. In Denton and Dallas and Fort Worth, just look at the screen. I'm going to go for about 22 to 25 minutes here, and here's what I believe. I believe all I am reading about you right now is not true. I believe you *can* focus and you *can* dial in for that long. So for the next 22 to 25 minutes (You can ask your folks after this; that's a minor miracle in and of itself.) I want to talk to you about God and what God says out of his Word to us, and I want you to dial in. Okay?

Now, parents, I am well aware and everyone else is well aware there will be more squirming in here than there normally is, although I hope you would squirm some when just you're in here. I'm well aware there will be a bit more squirming than usual, and here's what I believe. If the kids can dial in for just a bit and you can be all right with there being a bit more squirminess than there usually is, then we might all be able to hear from the Lord well today. If you'll breathe out and relax and kids will dial in, we'll let the Word of God press on all of us. So let's get to work.

Before we dive into Colossians, chapter 1, I want to talk a little bit about our children. What I mean by our children is, yes, our biological children, but also the children who are a part of this place. In Psalm 127 the Bible tells us children are a heritage. They are a gift from God. Children are literally to be viewed as a gift from God. There's a narrow way to take this and there's a broader way to take this, and I want us to think about it more broadly.

First and foremost, children are a gift to those who have been given the task to raise them. That can be biological, that can be via adoption, that can be via foster care, but children are a gift to those who are actively raising them. That's right and good before the Lord, but I think this text is a bit broader than that. I think what God is trying to say is it is really a gift to his covenant people; it is a gift to the church to have children in their midst.

In fact, you can see Jesus getting very aggressive toward his disciples when his disciples viewed children as a level of humanity that actually belongs on the fringes of ministry. In fact, if you don't know your Bible well, the disciples thought Jesus was just too busy for 6-year-olds and 7-year-olds, so they blocked the kids from coming to Jesus, and Jesus rebuked them and said, "The kingdom of God is like this. The kingdom of God is like they are. Not like *you* are, like *they* are. So, in fact, unless you come to me like they come to me, you have no place in the kingdom."

Children aren't to be viewed as kind of fringe, the church of the future, but rather as something we should watch and, in some ways (not all ways), model our faith and our pursuit of God after. The church has been given this gift of children. What does that mean for those of you who are single? What does that mean for those of you who are college students? What does that mean for those of you who are married and don't have children yet or married and can't have children? It means you have a role to play among this good gift also.

To tell you a practical way this plays itself out... My oldest is 10 years old, which means she's becoming increasingly aware I am not as cool as I think I am. I have been told by many that's just going to get worse. Praise God that as I lose my coolness in her eyes, there are two high-school girls at this church who my daughter thinks hung the moon and the stars. They love Jesus Christ very much. They come to our house, and they have started to love on my daughter in a way that she is growing increasingly detached from me (as she should, parents), and she is finding other preachers and other voices that pour into her life. Praise God.

Then we have invited some young men and young women into our lives to be a part of our family. We want to have them over for dinner. We want them to see what life actually looks like. No romance. This is life. This is what it looks like to have family devotional. It's chaos, and someone is probably getting disciplined while you're reading the Bible. We want them to see that and experience it. We want them to help clean the kitchen.

We're inviting them into our world. We've kind of taken them as part of our family, even though they're in their 20s, because they either live far away from their families or don't have believing family members. So we want to invite them into our home. This is why: children are a gift to the entire body of faith. If you don't have your own biological children, that doesn't matter.

Now what are we to do with this gift we've been given? That takes me to two separate texts. Deuteronomy 10:16-17 says, "**You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.**" The Bible is saying the way you and I are to live life as God's people is anything we put our hands to, we put our

hands to it through the lenses of God's Word and who God says he is and who God says we are. As we work with our hands, as we see the world around us, we see through the lenses of the Word of God. What does that have to do with our children? Verse 19 begins to unpack that for us.

"You shall teach them [the Word of God] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth." Then another text, Psalm 145:4: **"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."**

I want you to hear me say this. The primary grouping for discipleship has always been the home. How are we shaped more and more like Jesus? Because the home has the Word of God written on the gate and on the doorpost. When you're lying down and when you rise up and when you're eating and when you're not eating and before you go to bed at night and when you get up in the morning, what's the home to be about? The Word of the Lord, what God says, who God is. We are to be people of God.

Now let me be super honest here so we can sit under grace so we might be who we ought to be. There is no area of my life I feel like I fail more consistently in than this, and I'd better get an "amen" from a parent. There is no other area of my life I feel like I consistently fall short in than setting this temperature in my home. Nowhere else. When it comes to my marriage, I don't feel like I fail as often as I do in this. When it comes to work, I don't feel like I fail as much as I do in this.

I lose patience with my children more than anyone else. I snap at my children more than anyone else. I fail to be disciplined for the sake of my children more often than in any other area of my life. I am least consistent when it comes to the lives of my children. In fact, just to illustrate the point, there is no human being alive I have apologized more to than my 10-year-old daughter. The only reason 7-year-old Reid and 4-year-old Norah aren't up there is because of their ages. Give it time. Seriously, not even my wife have I apologized to that much, and I have apologized to that woman a *lot*.

I'm saying there's no other person alive I've apologized more to than my 10-year-old daughter, Audrey. "I'm sorry. Will you forgive Daddy? Daddy needs Jesus just as much as you do. So will you forgive me? I've already asked God to forgive me." This is how I try to mirror well for her the gospel. Then, golly, the gospel had better be true, because I go right back to doing the very thing I asked forgiveness for, which is what I get on to her all the time about. "We already talked about this." "Yeah, I know." "You've asked forgiveness for this 42 times." Isn't this a sad state of things?

Now I want to put this on you, because I know this is hard stuff today for many of us. If you're a little bit older and your children are grown and maybe your children are wayward, I want you to hear me say this. Your children have made their own decisions. If you feel shame or you feel embarrassed about where your older child is now in the world, I'm telling you what we have here is a failure for you to apply the gospel to your own heart and your own mind. Your children have made their own decisions.

"Well, Matt, I did this and I did this and I did this." Okay, look right at me. Then apologize. So you weren't the man of God you should have been when your child was younger. Apologize. Ask for forgiveness and then move on. Love them well and then move on. There is no flux capacitor. You're not going back. No one gets a mulligan on this. Own all you can own and maybe more, seek forgiveness, and then give them to the Lord.

To live in shame for how your 24-year-old is living because you wish you would have done more family devotionals back in the day makes you a functional savior. Listen to me. You are an awful, miserable failure of a savior. You don't have the tools needed to save. Parents can put kindling around the hearts of their kids, but they have no matches with which to light that wood. The Spirit of God does that. So own what you need to own before your children where you feel as though you have failed them, but the decisions they're making now are their decisions. So breathe, rest. God is good.

With that said, let me tell you how we want to serve you. Knowing the family unit is the primary place for discipleship in the lives of children, what we want to do as your pastors and shepherds here is just resource the mess out of you. When you walked in, you got a little blue sheet like this. It's a whole slew of resources that are meant to help you shepherd your family well, to love your family well and encourage your family well.

Now let me talk to you type A-ers. Don't buy everything on this list and create a pile in your house you're not going to touch. My encouragement to you is just look where you are in life, where your kids are in life, and grab one or two. Singles, grab one or two. If you want your kids to memorize the Bible, we record songs that are just purely Bible verses for you to play in the car, play in the house, that will help them memorize Scripture. It might even help *you* memorize some Scripture.

When you pick up your children every week, whether it's preschool or Little Village, you get a picture they drew, usually, and you have to try to figure out what that is. You probably get the question, "Do you like my drawing?" "I love it. Can you tell me what exactly it is?" Then you get a sheet that covers what we covered with your children, further questions to ask, and even things you can do as a family. We want to perpetually lay before you resources you might use to lead and shepherd your family well.

When all is said and done, I (and the rest of the elders) of The Village Church will stand in front of God and give an account for how we led this church. The elders and I will not stand in front of God and give an account for your children. That'll be you. What we're doing, dads and moms, is laying before you, "Here are easy, accessible tools for you to lead and love your family well when it comes to the things of God." Whether or not you pick those up and run with them, that's on you. We're providing. We're encouraging. We're pushing you that way. You'll have to be the ones who grab hold of it and run with it. Okay?

With that said, let's go to Colossians, chapter 1, starting in verse 15. Guys, you're already doing so well. I'm 10 minutes into my time. That gives me 12 to 15 minutes for us to have a serious talk here. So let's go. Your parents don't believe this is possible. I'm going to show them. Colossians, chapter 1. We're going to start in verse 15. This text is going to continually use the words *he, his, him*, and I'm just going to replace them with *who he is*, that *he* being Jesus. Here's what it says:

"[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through [Jesus] and for [Jesus]. And [Jesus] is before all things, and in [Jesus] all things hold together."

In my remaining 10 minutes, here's what I want to talk to you about: Jesus. Let me tell you why I want to talk about Jesus. Because, in one sense, Jesus is a man. He *was* a man. He *is* a man. He had a mom. Does anybody have a mom in here? That's going to be unanimous. Jesus had brothers and sisters. How many of you have brothers and sisters? Jesus ate food. He drank liquid. He slept at night. Jesus was and is a man, but Jesus was and is God.

He's not some sort of mythical character. He is not some sort of superhero. In fact, he makes the most brazenly created superhuman being look a bit ghetto and broke. He is God. What this text just taught us about Jesus is Jesus shows us who God is. He is the image of the invisible God. We can see in Jesus what is true about God, and all of the attributes of God, his kindness, his generosity, his love, his patience, his wisdom, have made themselves visible in the person of Jesus. As we watch Jesus operate, we watch Jesus operate in a way that's not purely human. He is fully human, but he is also God. I think you see this as he operates.

Several weeks ago there was a massive thunderstorm here in the area about 4:00 in the morning. It sounded like part of our house exploded. About six seconds later, my wife and I heard the pitter-patter of little feet dragging blankets into our bedroom, and then we had our two youngest on each side of the bed. My oldest stayed in her bed. I believe you could fire off a .45 auto in her room and she wouldn't move. But the two youngest are there in our room with blankets and pillows, because the storm scared them.

As the daddy, as a grownup, there's nothing I can do about that storm. I just have to tell them, "It's all right. Dad and Mom are here. Just lie down on the floor. You're welcome to stay in here." Jesus was stuck in a storm with some of his friends, his disciples, and he rebuked the storm. He told the storm to stop, and it listened to him. Two weeks ago, in this massive storm... I couldn't go outside and go, "Quit that! My kids are sleeping!" I just had to talk to the kids, because I'm a man. I can't rebuke the storm; I have to just comfort my kids. Jesus comforted his friends by telling the storm to stop, and it listened to him. How is that possible? Because Jesus is God.

One of my favorites, and one of the ways I think you see Jesus operate in a way that clearly shows he's God is Jesus has a good friend. His name is Lazarus. Lazarus gets sick and dies. They bury him. Jesus shows up and tells Lazarus he's not allowed to be dead anymore. Who gets to do *that*? "Roll away the stone. Lazarus, get up!" This isn't Mom and Dad getting you up for school. This is Lazarus, dead. He has been in the ground for a couple of days, and Jesus shows up and goes, "Get up!" and Lazarus gets up.

Who can tell a dead guy he's not allowed to be dead? God. *Only* God. In fact, how many of you are prone to make the same mistakes over and over and over again? Yeah. Kids, notice your folks' hands are up also. Here's what's great. One of the things we see about God toward his people, toward those he loves, is even though they make the same mistakes over and over and over again, he comes toward them; he doesn't move away from them because of that.

In fact, Jesus' disciples, the group who were closest to him, are constantly getting in trouble for the same exact things. In fact, a couple of times Jesus is like, "How long must I be with you? How long until you figure this thing out?" Yet Jesus patiently forgives, patiently walks. Even if you're prone to make the same mistakes over and over again, what we learn about God in Jesus is God knows and he still moves toward us, not away from us. That's really, really cool.

We have Jesus who shows us who God is, but we also see Jesus as God, that he shapes the world and the universe as we know it. Do you want to know another reason why we clearly just say Jesus is God? Because the Bible tells us Jesus is the Creator of everything. Jesus is the Creator of everything that exists. There is nothing that is that Jesus did not create. What this does is it shows us the majesty of God.

Now maybe you don't know what *majesty* means. If you're a kid in here, I'll try to explain majesty. For you grownups, *majesty* is an imposing grandeur. Kids, it's that emotion you feel when a big dog comes up to smell you. It's kind of cool and terrifying all at the same time. You like the dog but don't want him to kill you. That kind of emotion. That's majesty. That's grandeur. It's a "This is awesome and scary all at the

same time." When Jesus creates the moon and the stars and the mountains and the oceans and all that is big in the world, he's showing us who God is. He shapes the universe.

It's also because Jesus is God he has all authority. Now let me tell you what *authority* means. *Authority* is simply the right to be in charge. I have three children, 10, 7, and 4, and all of them at different times feel like they have the right to be in charge. They *don't* have the right to be in charge, because everything they have in their entire world is a gift from me. The toys they have? I bought those toys. The bikes they have? That was me. They don't have a bike. I have a bike I let them use. If I need to, I take away their right to ride my bike I bought them.

If my daughter was here right now she'd be like, "So you have a princess bike?" "Yes, I do...a princess bike that's in the garage for the next two weeks." As the daddy, I have the right to be in charge. Well, because Jesus is the Creator of all things, everything any of us has is his. He, and he alone, has the right to be in charge and the power to back up that authority. Jesus shows us who God is. He has shaped the universe so we might marvel at God's majesty and trust his right to be in charge.

The last thing I want to say about Jesus out of this text is Jesus sustains. There are two things we see here about Jesus in this text in regard to Jesus sustaining. He shows us who God is, he shapes the universe, and now we see a Jesus who sustains. Here's what that means, twofold. There is nothing better than Jesus Christ. There is nothing more valuable, nothing lovelier, nothing we should have our minds on, our hearts on, our thoughts on, that's bigger and better than Jesus Christ. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.

When God created you, regardless of your age, you have been created to dwell in and be with the God of the universe. Here's the issue. You have a dirty heart. I have a dirty heart, and I can't get myself clean. You can't come into the presence of God with a dirty heart. In the same way my kids aren't allowed to come into the house with dirty shoes on... You have to take those dirty shoes off. But sometimes they're muddy enough you literally have to hose them down in the yard. There's mud on their shoes. There's mud on their hands. There's mud all over their pants. The only solution for them coming into the house clean is for you to take all of that off.

Here's the issue: You and I cannot clean our own hearts. Your parents cannot clean your heart. Folks, you obeying all of the rules cannot clean your heart. The other way Jesus shows us he is God is he, and he alone, can make clean what is dirty. Being a good kid doesn't clean your heart. Being a good man, a good woman, doesn't clean your heart. Even in you behaving rightly, more than likely you have wrong motivation, and you are stealing the glory from God, who alone can clean your heart.

Jesus holds all things together by cleaning our hearts and ushering into the presence of God. That tear, that separation between our hearts and God is solved in Jesus Christ alone. So yes, Jesus *was* a man. Yes, Jesus *is* a man, but Jesus is God. He shows us what the Father is like. He is the Creator of all things, and he, and he alone, can make right what has gone wrong in our hearts. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you just for an opportunity to celebrate Jesus. Jesus, thank you for all you have created, all you have done. Thank you that you show us the love of the Father, the patience of the Father, the forgiveness of the Father. I thank you, Jesus, for the majesty that's all around us. I thank you, Jesus, that you hold all things together. I thank you there is nothing more valuable, nothing more lovely, nothing more beautiful than you. You are good, and you do good, and we thank you and praise you. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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