

Train Up a Child

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[0:00] I would like to say it's a privilege to stand here again this evening.

I will be honest with you and say that I am amazed that any pastor can week in and week out. Be able to bring a full-length message.

I'll honestly say it was very stressful this week. I have more appreciation for what my dad, our pastor, does in preparing messages in the ministry that he has to do outside of preparing messages.

So I have a newfound appreciation and respect for what he does. And you can tell him that. I will tell him that. I will be glad when he comes back and I can go back to just doing Wednesday, Sunday mornings in ministry.

But until then, please turn your Bibles to the book of Numbers. The book of Numbers. It's not often that we preach out of the book of Numbers. And I'll admit that tonight, and I cleared it with my father first, I said, you know, Dad, I don't think I really want to preach a typical sermon Sunday night.

[1:22] Since it is a more laid-back atmosphere, obviously. A more laid-back atmosphere. It's generally people who are generally very faithful to the church.

I would like to speak tonight on the subject of student ministry. And so, whereas I do think that we will pull much-needed truth from Scripture tonight, I do want to kind of give you a pulse, so to speak, on student ministry.

To hopefully educate you on what students go through. And kind of the overall issue that we're facing with student ministry tonight.

And so if you'll turn to Numbers chapter 13, I'm not going to read it yet. But you can keep your thumb there. Or if you're a quick Bible drill type student, you can wait until we read it later and turn there real quick.

I did Bible drill growing up, and it was always a great experience. So if you're like that, you can wait. But basically, like I said, this evening I want it to be a message about students.

[2:34] Students are under attack in our country. They really are. And Eli just looked at me like, what? We're under attack? He's about to go get his helmet.

Students are under attack in this country. And I've pulled together some statistics. And much of this message comes from a book that I've been reading recently by a man named Votie Bauckham.

I mentioned him earlier this morning in the sermon. And Votie Bauckham is kind of the forefront, the face of a new movement among churches called Family Driven Ministry.

And the book is actually called Family Driven Faith. And I've been very challenged. I've been reading it for about two weeks now. And I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm a very slow reader. And I usually have to reread things just because my mind wanders into la-la land.

And so when I say I've been reading it for two weeks, that doesn't mean I've read it two or three times. That means I've been working through it for two weeks. And so I was challenged by what he wrote in it.

[3:45] Because if you know anything about student ministry, you know that the church is really at a crisis as far as students. I mentioned this morning that students are leaving the church after graduating high school in record numbers.

So we're facing a crisis. You can look around on a typical Sunday in this church and in most churches across the country. And you can look around and you'll see teenagers. And then you'll see late 20s and up.

And we really lose. We're losing the early 20s. And it begs the question, why? Why are we losing this age group?

And so I pulled some statistics together just so you kind of know what teenagers are facing. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, now this is obviously just a government-run program, it says, Every 78 seconds, an adolescent in this country attempts suicide. Every 90 minutes, one succeeds. Every 20 minutes, an adolescent is killed in an accident. And every 80 minutes, an adolescent is murdered. Every 31 seconds, an adolescent becomes pregnant. [4:57] And nearly half of all high school seniors have used an illegal drug by the time they graduate. Of those high school seniors, 90% of them drink.

Some drink often. Some drink seldom. And I don't really care where you fall in your conviction of whether alcohol is right or wrong. I think most of us can't agree that we don't want our teenagers partaking in alcohol.

And so it's a sobering statistic. No pun intended. It really didn't. Anyway, that came out. Some more statistics.

The Barna Research Group, they conducted a poll. If you know anything about George Barna, he's a pollster, basically. And he'd do cold calls, all kinds of polls, where they would kind of find out the temperature of a given demographic, a given age group.

They do all kinds of polls, political polls, church polls. In fact, if you go to the website, you can, as a church, have them do a poll for you. And so if you're wanting to know exactly what your church members believe about a certain thing, they will call your church members and poll them and pull the data together.

[6:07] And so Barna Research Group, a famous research group, they said teenagers rank as the most spiritually active demographic in the nation. Teenagers are generally more likely to attend church than their parents.

And so it's not a matter, it's not an issue with the teenagers today with them being under attack. It's not an issue of them not being receptive. It's not an issue of them not being spiritual because they're here.

They're more likely to attend than their parents. Basically, the way that they discovered if they were more spiritually active is if they called and basically they would say, if you need something, right, if you are searching for truth, if you're searching for some kind of higher power, this is a question they basically asked them.

And teenagers were more spiritually active than any other demographic. They're hungry for truth.

They're hungry for any truth. It says they're most likely to attend church than their parents.

And while they're more spiritual, they're less disciplined. Because only about one-third of teens spend any time reading their Bible.

[7:15] Whereas 53% of church-going adults generally will read their Bible. And so what we see is a lack of discipline. They're more spiritual. They're more likely to go to church.

But they're less likely to practice spiritual disciplines. Only 45% of teens said making a spiritual connection at church is important. They would rather, the majority of teenagers prefer teaching that relates to their daily life than teaching that would teach, that would tell them the tenets of their faith. They would much rather have a relatable message. Now by the time they reach college age, 60% of college students say that they were active in church but no longer are.

That's 60%. Only 20% of college students maintain the same spiritual level of activity as they did as a teenager. Only, basically, the only time we see this age group return is when they have children. Teenagers will leave the church after about two years of college. And then when they start having children, they get back into church. Most of them will return to church at some point, in some way, because they're concerned with the spiritual well-being of their kids.

[8:25] And that's when they return. But it's funny, 60% of college students, like I said, are not active in church, and yet 78% claim to be Christians. And so they have no activity in church, but they still claim Christ.

Now let's move on to the church teenager. The church teenager. 70-80% of teenagers leave the church by their second year in college. Of teenagers who claim to be born again, 80% don't believe in absolute truth.

80%. 63% don't believe Jesus is the Son of God. 58% believe all faiths teach equally valid truths.

51% don't believe Jesus rose from the dead.

65% don't believe Satan was real. 63% don't believe the Holy Spirit is real. 52% believe Jesus sinned while he was on the earth.

Now that's church teenagers. That's not a poll of basically any teenager in America. That's specifically teenagers who attend church. Now let me pose this to you.

[9:32] They attend church, they claim Christianity, but do they know enough to be a believer if they think that Jesus didn't sin? Or, sorry. If they think that Jesus did sin. If they don't believe in Satan.

And so they sit in our pews, but the majority of them don't have enough knowledge to even make a decision for Christ. Now we can move on to the church parents.

And I say this, I should make a disclaimer. I am not a parent, obviously. And I don't stand up here saying that I have any special knowledge or that I can say I would do things better than you.

You know, just wait until I have kids. Those kids are probably going to be terrors. Just pray they take the best from both of us. Me and my wife.

But anyway, so I'm not standing up here and like, you know, I'm not going to get on to parents. But I do think, early in my ministry, I was deathly afraid of even approaching the subject of parenting.

[10:33] Because you're not a parent, Chris. I became a youth pastor at the age of 20. And I was very afraid of telling any parent, you know, they'd come and ask me, what should I do about my kid? I don't know.

I have no idea. Pray for them. I'll pray for them too. Let's pray for them together. But I have, as I've matured in my faith, realized that though I'm not a parent, as long as I can point to Scripture, whatever I say has validity.

And so while I would not dare to suppose that I can stand here and give you wisdom from my own mind about parenting, I can give you wisdom from Scripture. But the church parent, Barna again, he did a survey.

And what do you think the number one goal of the church parent was for their children? Getting saved. Education.

That was the number one goal among church-going parents. The number one goal they have for their children is that they get a good education. Getting saved. Having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

[11:39] Less than half. Less than half of the number of parents that wanted education. One of their first goal to be their children knowing Christ.

It's a sobering, sobering statistic. When you look at generations, the World War II generation, the builders.

65% of World War II generation as teenagers transitioned in adulthood as Bible-believing adults. If you look at the baby boomers, 35% of them transitioned into adults as Bible-believing Christians. And my generation, the statistics are still very early. My generation is in the generation in front of me. Basically, less than 10% of us. The teenage generation now, they're saying it will probably be 4% will transition into Bible-believing adults.

And so if you don't think we have a problem with our students, then you need to wake up. Because we're about to have our last Christian generation. And so this morning, let's read.

[12:50] This morning. It's the evening now. I'm sorry. Let's read. Numbers. I hope you're there. I'm going to read verses 1 through 3.

And then I'm going to skip down and finish the story. If you're familiar with the story, it's about the spies in the land. It says, Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Send out for yourself men, so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel.

You shall send a man from each of their father's tribes, every one a leader among them. So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Parian, at the command of the Lord, all of them men who are heads of the sons of Israel.

Basically, what you have is Israel is sitting on the edge of the promised land. This is the land that God has promised them that they will possess. And so God says, Send in spies so they can spy out the land.

That's a pretty intelligent thing to do. It's not that God didn't know it was there. It was just kind of the thing to do. Right? And so they send in the 12 spies, every single one of them a leader in Israel.

[13:55] And they go in this land, and they spy it out. And if you read the passage, it is very good. It's a land flowing with milk and honey. It's an amazing land. A lot better than the wilderness that they're hanging out in right now.

This is a good place to be. And so they go in the land, and then they come back. And I'm going to pick up in verse 30. And basically what has happened is the spies have come back, and they've given, yes, it's a good land, but they've given a negative report, saying, hmm, we probably can't take it.

So verse 30, this one man stands up, it says, Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it. But the men who had gone up with them said, We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us. They gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land, which they had spied out, saying, The land through which we have gone in spying out is a land that devours its inhabitants.

And all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim, and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.

[15:06] Chapter 14, Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, Would that we had died in the land of Egypt.

Or would that we have died in this wilderness. Why does the Lord bring us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder. Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?

So they said to one another, Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt. Now, youth ministry, it's interesting. I love politics.

I'm not going to get into politics here, I promise. We already speak about religion enough in church. Let's not include politics. So, I'm not going to get into politics, but basically, in politics, you can really boil down much of the political belief to either A, more government, or B, less government.

And youth ministry is not that different. Youth ministry today has basically split into two groups. Either A, more programming, more church, or B, less programming, and more family.

[16:18] That's basically the two directions youth ministry has taken. And so the question this morning, this morning, I keep saying that, I'm sorry, this evening, the question this evening, is what are we going to do as a church about this epidemic that is overcoming our children?

You see, I consider myself somewhat the spy. That's what I see myself in this story. I'm the spy. I've gone into the land. I've experienced student ministry.

Some of you are fellow spies with me. You've come and braved the rigors of student ministry at some point in your life. We're all spies. We've gone into the land.

And so tonight, I'm bringing you a report. I'm showing you all these statistics, these terrible statistics. And this land is full of giants. We're like grasshoppers.

We really are. You have the giant of MTV. MTV defines our culture. I encourage you, and hear me in this, I encourage you to watch it with wisdom.

[17:18] But if you want to know what the culture of teenagers is going to, watch the MTV Music Awards. You will be appalled. I will be surprised if you make it through the whole award if you're an adult.

I'll be surprised. I had to turn it off. I ended up watching it online because I was required to for a youth ministry class. But I had to turn it off that night that it was on because I was utterly appalled by what happened there.

Turn on the Nickelodeon Teen Choice Awards. Just as bad. They're spouting profanity. And this is the Teen's Choice Awards. And they're spouting profanity in it.

And so we're going into a land full of giants. We're going to a land where MTV reigns. Premarital sex is not just encouraged. It's expected. There's a lack of absolute truth.

Evolution is preached as fact. It's anti-Christian. And it's anti-Bible. But like Caleb, I am pleading with you as a church, with you as believers, followers of Christ, not to be discouraged by those giants.

[18:29] Because what happens is sometimes we go in there and we get scared. I'm like, this generation is just too far gone. I cannot make a difference. Maybe I'm too old. Maybe I don't talk well enough.

Maybe I can't relate to teenagers. Maybe teenagers scare me. They can be scary. Alright, there's all these giants. Giants in the land.

But listen, in this story, the people of Israel disobey God. And Moses actually has to intercede on their behalf just so, because God's threatening to destroy the entire nation and start over. So Moses intercedes and God punishes Israel. He forgives them, but He punishes them. And basically what you have is God lets this entire generation wander around in the wilderness and die. They're not allowed to enter the promised land. You have exceptions to that. Obviously Joshua, Caleb, people like him. There are exceptions to this. But as a nation, an entire generation dies because they weren't obedient to God.

[19:36] I believe we're at a turning point. Either we can disobey the Lord and continue to take comfort in the programming that we provide for teenagers, which is not a bad thing.

I'm not demonizing programming. I'm a youth pastor. I kind of like the fact that you provide the means for me to do programming. We can take comfort in the programming that has obviously failed students, or we can take possession of the land back from those that have stolen it. Your children do not belong to MTV. They do not belong to schools that would pour evolution and anti-Bible, anti-God ideology down their throats.

They belong to you. By extension, they belong to us as a church. These are our students and our children. And so, I'm of the ideology that actions speak louder than words.

They just do. And, we're losing this generation, I think, based on our actions. And Vodibachum would echo this in his book.

[20:45] We're losing our generation, this next generation, based on actions. You say, well, what kind of actions are we doing? Well, and I know I'm about to step on toes here. And believe me, God has visited me first.

Because, I'll go ahead and tell you this. My little brother, who's not little, obviously, he's not here.

Jonathan's a hoss. You know Jonathan. He's a big guy. Got a lot of muscle.

Got a lot of strength. He's a super gentle guy. And so, ever since I realized that he was just going to be like a giant, like this really big hoss kind of guy, I'm like, Mom, make him play football.

Please. I don't care if he doesn't want to play football. Make him play. He could like, at 11, he would have been an entire line by himself. No one would have wanted to come against him. He was so much bigger than our 11 year olds.

And even now, at 14, like coaches would salivate over this guy trying out, like, oh my goodness.

This guy, we could turn him into a superstar.

[21:45] And so, for, ever since I can remember, Mom, please, you didn't let me play sports, let him play sports. Put him in school. Even this, just a couple weeks ago, I had Jonathan in my office.

He was hanging out with me one day. I was like, Jonathan, go play football. Go play football. I heard the Westland School needs some football players. Call them and ask them if you can come play.

And he's like, no, I just don't feel like it. And I never really got it. Never really got why sports weren't important to my parents growing up.

I didn't get why they didn't put me in school so I could pursue sports. I'm not an outstanding athlete, but I was good enough to at least play on a team. I never really got that until I started looking at one, what sports has done to our church.

Now, I bet some of you can remember a time when sports weren't played on Sunday. And yet, we've gone as a church from a time when Sunday was sacred and our kids were in church on Sunday to, hey, we got a baseball tournament this weekend.

[22:52] Man, Lord willing, we'll play on Sunday because that means we won all weekend. Children are not all that complex.

They do what they're taught. Now, don't mistake what I just said. They do not do what they're told. We all know that. Sometimes they do.

Maybe your child does it more often than not. They do what they're told. But every time a teenager, a student, will do what they are taught. And so, what do we teach them?

Well, we teach them to skip church. But it's got to be an important reason. Right? We've got to be playing a tournament on Sunday. It's okay to skip church.

Voddy Bauckham shares a great story in his book about a father who comes to him just weeping about his teenage son who's just went off to college a year earlier. And basically, he recounts the story and not knowing what to do about the problem that he's faced with his teenage son.

[23:58] He says, listen, listen, pastor. My son and I were close. We were in church all the time. And so, Voddy Bauckham begins to have this conversation and realizing that the son has really

rebelled.

He's fallen out of church. They had to bring him home from school because he ended up failing his classes and they put him in a community college just so they could keep an eye on him and make sure he's doing his studies. And through their conversation, Voddy Bauckham learns that his son was a baseball player.

He played baseball. And then he learned, you know, baseball season, baseball players, they tend to miss a lot of Sundays. So not only was this kid a baseball player, but he played for traveling teams.

It wasn't just schools. It was traveling teams. And so you have a school team that already jeopardizes all this time. And then you have a traveling team which only plays on weekends. And so basically what he had taught his son his entire life is don't miss church.

God is important. Unless, of course, there's baseball. And so his father is distraught and doesn't understand this. So basically what happens is the son leaves to go to college.

[25:10] And pretty soon he's not attending church. Right? But what had happened is that's the time that his baseball friends wanted to hang out on Sundays. Saturday nights and Sundays. Well, all his life he was taught one thing.

God is important. But baseball is more important. Because we make exceptions for baseball. And so he starts hanging out with his friends. And he kept this downward spiral.

He stopped going to class. He stopped doing his studies. And finally he's cotton-dinched for using anabolic steroids. And when the truth came out this kid was not a prodigy baseball player who got on teams because he was just that good.

His father had started this kid playing baseball at six years old. He had paid for private lessons from six years old on. And so for this student's entire life he's taught that baseball is his God.

And so when he got to college and met up with these prodigy players the players who genuinely were just natural baseball players he started to fall behind and when the coach threatened to take his position the only thing he could resort to was steroid use to boost his performance.

[26:31] Baseball was his God. He was taught that. Students do what they're taught. They skipped church because we say things are more important than church by our actions.

They use foul language because we let it slip out of our mouths. Or if we had the self-control and not let it slip out of our mouths we let them sit in front of a TV that spews it day in and day out.

They use foul language and our children divorce because let's be honest we allow our children to practice divorce their entire teenage lives.

we encourage them to go from one meaningless exclusive relationship to the next from the time they're old enough to even understand that they might be attracted to a guy or a girl.

So oh you know Johnny his girlfriend Susan they're just so cute yada yada yada yada they're 13 they're children the chances of this relationship lasting to marriage is astronomically small and yet we teach them by the time they do get to marriage they're so used to ending relationships that it's not that difficult several years down the road when things get tough it's not that difficult because they practice it all their lives Ephesians 6:4 says fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord and so what can we do as a church God has really placed this on my heart and I would ask us as a church to commit and I say this I really want to turn the student ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church to more of a family driven one we're playing volleyball tonight

[28:25] I cannot tell you parents and adults who came down there two weeks ago how blessed I was that y'all were there I was absolutely blessed because there were parents and students and even some adults who didn't have students just hanging out spending time together playing volleyball it was amazing and that's what I want for our student ministry because I want to put the ability and the discipline the discipleship everything I want to put it back in the hands of parents and I want to support y'all and so as a parent I would ask you if this fires you up commit commit to being there one commit to being there for student events we'll do exclusive student events like camp you know not every parent can go to camp obviously it'd probably be pretty expensive and I couldn't pay for all of them right we would run out of bus space if all our parents went so there would still be exclusive things that are just the students students like man

I don't want parents hanging out so it'll still be that but basically what I want to do is do things like shakes and sand I want to do things that are family ministry that get parents spending time with

students and that support y'all in the eyes of students and so I ask that you commit to being there commit to bringing your student to church commit to bringing to the events and commit to staying at any time it's possible to staying at that event with your student and so what about people who don't have any children or people who don't have children maybe they're already grown and I would ask you to commit because here's the truth a lot of our students right now have parents and they do attend church the truth is there's some students that we have parents maybe go to a different church maybe they don't attend church at all and we're going to get more students like that and so what are we going to do if we're if we're a family driven ministry if this is the way that God would have us move as a church what do we do about the kids whose parents just aren't involved or at a different church well I think that's where the rest of the church members step in and so basically what I would like to do is have sort of surrogate parents adults who you don't have children anymore maybe they're moved on maybe you never had kids in the first place you just didn't do it but you can pour into the life of a student and you can disciple them and you can help them and if you would be willing to commit to that I will partner you with a student I will partner you with a student to help to mentor them and bring them up and give them that family driven faith that is the direction that I want to go I want Highland Park Baptist Church to commit to bringing students up in the Lord and not to just shovel it onto the programming and budget that's not the way to do it we're losing a generation so let's commit I'm in with this Proverbs 22 6 22 6 says train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it that's really the answer why in the world are students leaving the church in droves we're not training we're not training in the way they should go