



A Beautiful Design – The Next Generation

Beau Hughes – November 23, 2014

How are you? Are you good? We decided to extend *A Beautiful Design* one week. I know some of you thought it ended last week. It did, and we resurrected it for this week. If you have a Bible, turn to Psalm 78, and I'll try to connect some dots of why we did that, why we would push it forward one week. If you're new here, if this is your first time among us, my name is Beau. I'm one of the pastors and often have the privilege of teaching here on Sundays.

Our church just finished a 10-week series that was called *A Beautiful Design*. We ended it last week, and now we're finishing it for real this week. What we wanted to do was sort of bring together Family Worship Weekend and *A Beautiful Design*. Matt last week talked about these six pastoral hopes he had coming out of *A Beautiful Design*.

I thought, "What an opportunity to firm everything that was said last week, but then add one and really take today to meditate as a church about the privilege and responsibility we have as a congregation to pass along these things we've been thinking about and learning about these last 10 weeks to the next generation." So that's what we're going to spend our time meditating on together tonight.

If there's any group of people who need to understand these things and are really going to have their beliefs tested about these things we've talked about, to some degree it's going to be all of us, but to a larger degree, it's going to be those who are 4 to 8 years old who are in this next generation, and we as a church have the opportunity to train them in the ways of the Lord and to pass along God's will and his desire and his design for their lives.

Kiddos, if you have one of these... Does anybody have one of these? You can mark on this. If you've never seen these... If you have kids, if you ever want to bring them into service, which we love for them to be in here... Even part of the purpose of this weekend is to have them practice being in here with us.

Kiddos, you can say who's speaking. That's Pastor Beau. Some of you adults this would actually probably help. Let's be real. We should probably just have Play-Doh or something. I used to do that in my youth group when I was a youth pastor. I would throw out Play-Doh, because the guys in particular listened better when they were doing something. Anyway, book, chapter, verse. We're in Psalm 78, verses 1-8. You can draw a picture of me or whatever else comes to your mind here. But I just want to let you know, parents and kids, that we have these for you on your way in.

Who is the next generation? Secularly, they're trying to define this new generation. It would be the post-millennial generation. This group of people doesn't yet have a name. Some of the names I was looking up this week... These were ideas for the name of the new generation. The iGeneration. That's probably a front-runner. Another one was Generation Z. Another name was Gen Tech. The Swipe Generation, which just sounds weird. I don't like that one too much. The Net Gen, Digital Natives, the Plurals, which is not really helpful, but I get where they're going.

Here's my personal favorite: The Screeners. You're a part of the Screener generation. It's like, "That's cool. Whatever." So everybody is still trying to define and put a word to what this generation is going to be, but to get clarity for us as a church, as we meditate on these things, I think it's important to have clarity. Who *is* the next generation? The way I would define the next generation among our community of faith is those under 18 years of age who are still being directly parented and trained up in the home.

In our community of faith... Be really confronted with this number, this stat. There are about 300 to 350 who fit that description. That's a big number. The average church is about a third that size. So essentially, we have three churches worth of people in the next generation, just in our community of faith here, who are here week in and week out.

We've talked a lot about, "How do we train and make disciples of children?" If you've been here any time at all, you know typically what we talk about with sermons like this is we're talking to the parents, which is a great thing. More specifically, we talk to the fathers. If you've been here for any time at all, you've heard it said probably a number of times, "Parents, it's not our responsibility to raise your children and disciple them. We're not going to give an account to God for the nourishment spiritually of your children. You are."

I think that's true in as much as we mean it, but at the same time, what I want to pull away from a little bit today is think less about those who are parents and more all of us as a church. I think we all are, as a community of faith, as a church, going to give an account. I think it's going to be different than the account I will give for my three children, but I do think we're all going to give an account, if you're a member of this church, for the way we love and disciple one another, and certainly that includes the next generation.

So it's not just the parents' responsibility, although they take the lead in discipling their children, but it's also the church's responsibility to partner with the parents, to nurture those children and train them in the fear of the Lord. Listen, friends. Amidst a culture like ours... I mean, if you can just put yourself in the shoes of a 3-year-old right now.

If they're going to grow up in a home learning the commandments of God, if they're going to grow up learning about God's beautiful design for their lives and believing it and trying to live with conviction in light of those beliefs, can you imagine what's waiting for them next year, five years from now, seven years from now, when they enter into middle school and high school?

What's waiting for them is a culture that is unlike the culture we grew up in. The culture we grew up in, at the very worst, was probably moderately disinclined from the Christian faith. Maybe some of us grew up in a context where the Christian faith was beleaguered in a significant way, but for most of us, that has not been the case. But you do understand, our 4-year-olds, our 5-year-olds, our 8-year-olds, are never going to know a day...

Little Beau over here is never going to know a day where he's not on the line for what he believes about Christ from our culture. He's never going to know a day when culture is not looking at him and categorizing him and sifting him and putting him over here based on what he believes about Christ, about sexuality, about gender, about marriage. You and I didn't grow up in that. Even those of us who are 18 to 20 years old in this room didn't grow up with that, not in the way these children are growing up.

So what I want to do as a church is to pause and consider that, to try to put ourselves in the shoes of these young ones who are growing up in this culture. Listen. I don't mean to be alarmist. I think growing up in a culture that really is going to have animosity toward what we believe is going to actually serve the faith of our children in a way that the culture that sort of you got brownie points for being a Christian... It sort of gained you something in culture when many of us were growing up.

That having evaporated, I think for them it's going to be more helpful to have their faith tempted and tried at an early age, because the Scriptures promise that produces steadfastness. That produces perseverance. The very things we'll see in the days ahead... Many even who are in their 30s, 40s, and 50s are going to fall away because they can't take the pressure.

For our kids to be growing up in that furnace, I see the benefit of that. So I don't mean to be alarmist. I just mean for us as a church tonight to think through the privilege and responsibility and sobriety we have to help those in the next generation trust the Lord despite the pressure we're going to feel. That has been my prayer all week long.

This is the first of many conversations we're going to have as a church in the course of our days together about this. This is sort of an introduction to this bigger conversation about, "Yes, the parents have responsibility, but whether you have children or not in this church, it's all of our collective responsibilities to care for and train up the next generation." So let me pray, and then we'll dive into Psalm 78 and meditate on that for a few moments and just trust that the Spirit of God will, in a really healthy way, encourage and bind our hearts about these things.

Father in heaven, we pray now that by your Holy Spirit, you would come and enlighten our hearts as we read your Word. Whatever thoughts or lack thereof that we come into this room with tonight about our role in making disciples of the next generation, I pray you would shape from your Word and, God, that you would encourage us where we need to be encouraged, that you would lead us along where we need to be led along. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

Psalm 78. Are you there with me? Psalms is a songbook and a prayer book. The people would sing and pray these songs that were written down. Psalm 78 is a unique psalm in that it recounts the salvation history of the people of God. We're going to read verses 1-8, but after that, it talks about the story of God's saving acts from the time he led them out of the exodus to the time of King David. That is probably when it was written, which is why the history only went up that far.

It's instructing the people of God, as it recounts what God has done, to be faithful in the present. So it's not just a wisdom psalm. It's actually a psalm that was given to instruct the people. You see that right away if you look at verse 1 with me. The psalmist is writing, and he says, "**Give ear, O my people, to my teaching...**" He's saying, "Listen to me. I have something to teach you." He says,

"...incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable..." A *parable* being a proverb or a wise saying.

"I will utter [or make known] dark sayings..." These sayings, these riddles and proverbs. "...from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us." Jesus actually quoted this verse as he was teaching in his ministry. The psalmist here is saying, "Listen. I'm going to tell you and remind you of the saving work of God, in order to instruct you to be faithful in the here and now." There's something specific he's wanting them to be faithful about, and it's found in verse 4.

It says, "We..." That *we* here are the adults in the congregation. He's going to talk about the fathers. He's going to talk about the parents here in a minute, but he's talking about, "We will not hide these things from our children, these sayings of old about the workings of God amidst our community. We're not going to hide these things from children, but we're going to tell them. As a community, we're going to tell them and declare them to the generation. We're going to declare the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders he has done."

In this verse, you have here the sense of our responsibility alongside the parents to tell the children, to proclaim to the children, to commend (from Psalm 145 that we already read from to call us to worship) the kingdom of God to the next generation, to talk about his deeds, to talk about what he has done that's so awesome. Basically, what I think the psalmist is saying is God is a household name among us as a people. Our children have to know who he is and what he has done.

There are a couple of household names in the Hughes family that might be surprising to you. I just want to share a couple of them with you. The first household name that's in the Hughes family with my wee ones, especially my 5-year-old, my 3-year-old, and my 2-year-old... They know the name Michael Jordan, and they're right to know the name Michael Jordan.

Some of you know Mike Turner, who's one of our elders, and myself actually have had the privilege for the last number of years of being the chaplains for the men's basketball team at UNT. In fact, just 30 minutes ago I went over there and prayed for them before their big game tonight, and then rushed over here. I started to take my son... We get to go to a lot of the athletic events. We go to some of the football games, the volleyball games. We go to as many as we can.

He really got into basketball a couple of years ago, mostly because of the tunnel and the smoke when they ran out and the flags. That's cool, whatever. But he was watching the game a little bit, so he started to think these guys at UNT... You know, he just started to really want to go home and pretend to be like them, which was great. I love these guys and pray for them often and am privileged to have the opportunity to spend time with them.

Yet as he started to develop his framework for basketball, I needed him to know what basketball really was. I needed him to know what greatness really was. I didn't go to LeBron. Can we be real here? Let's just talk real. I'm fine with LeBron. I didn't go to Kevin Durant, who's probably my favorite current guy. I went to Jordan, because Jordan is the best. He's the greatest. Now we're not talking about character here or any of that. We're just talking about great deeds they have done in their particular field. Greatness on the basketball court equals Michael Jordan.

So I got Haddon, and his sisters CJ and Elliot wanted to come, and we just sat in front of the TV and had a lesson. The lesson was, "Let me turn on YouTube highlight clips, and let's watch. I need to drill into you greatness. I need you to understand this." So we sat there. Of course, in every scene, Jordan has his mouth open and his tongue is hanging out. So CJ, very observant, was like, "Why is he crying? What's he crying about? Why is Michael Jordan crying?" She was really worried about it for like three days. "Why is Michael Jordan crying?" I'm like, "No, he's not crying. It's hard to explain."

So we just sort of put that before them. Then we're walking in the Golden Triangle Mall a couple of weeks later, which, by the way, is getting better. It doesn't feel nearly as dangerous. You used to walk in the mall and you were like, "That whole booth is illegal, and that food might kill me. I'm going to go over here to the playground, which probably has some sort of..." The whole deal was just unsafe, but what else do you do when it's freezing? Anyway, it's getting better.

We were walking through, and I'm just trying to wrangle the kids, and all of a sudden CJ goes, "Daddy, Daddy! Michael Jordan!" I looked over, and I saw *that*. I thought, "Job done. I've trained her. Well done." I was simultaneously ashamed, mostly proud, though. So that is a household name. The other household name in our home you might be surprised to find out is Whitney Houston. If you pull out my phone right now, it's probably on the iTunes. She just had that greatest live performances come out a couple of weeks ago. The kids have been listening to that.

If you want to know about singing, you want to know about music, you have to know about Whitney Houston. People who come over to my house will attest we do talk about Whitney Houston. Our

kids know who Whitney Houston is. If you hear *this* sound... Do y'all know what that is? If that comes on in the house, which randomly comes on. I'll be doing whatever I'm doing, and that'll come on. Do you know what that song is? They will run in, and a dance party will ensue in the living room.

Again, somewhat to my shame, mostly I think to the glory of God in giving that woman such a voice, my 2-year-old daughter Elliot knows every word to that song. Even the babysitter the other night was going, "She just walked through the kitchen..." She was cooking dinner for the kids, and all of a sudden Elliot just, on pitch, is singing, "I wanna dance with somebody, I wanna feel the heat with somebody," which is sort of weird. So we're working on things in the Hughes house. But they have to know about Whitney Houston.

That's sort of what's going on here in verse 4 in a much more significant way, where in the household of God, it's our responsibility that the children know about the greatness of God, about what he has done, about who he is. They should hear about it, and it's our role, along with the parents, to tell.

He goes on in verse 5 and says, "[God] **established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel...**" It's saying God created and gave his people a will. He gave them a beautiful design. **"...which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children..."** Here's the role of the parents with the role of the congregation.

"He did this so that the next generation might know about this, might know the commandments of God, might know his will, the children even yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children." Here is the generational discipleship. He says, "This should be going on so that they should set their hope in God." Get a picture for our generation here.

"...so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast..." Was fickle, where their faith was all rooted in their feelings, which calls into question whether that's faith or not to begin with. That's not what we want in the next generation. We want a generation that's steadfast, not fickle, whose spirit is not unfaithful to God like the generation before.

If you could just pause for a moment and gather the vision for the next generation being presented here. By the way, how many of you are in college? When I clarified the next generation, I

purposely... I don't know where you're at in your life with your family, if you've had a right of passage into adulthood. I know you're in a unique period of transition, where people will talk about it different ways, but for the purpose of what we're talking about, I have purposely situated you on *this* side of the next generation.

You are not the next generation. You're an adult, as we're having this conversation, and I'm calling you, hopefully gently, into pouring into the next generation with us. So wherever you are in your thinking about, "Am I adult? Am I not an adult? What's going on here?" I'm telling you, in terms of this conversation, you're over here with us thinking about the next generation, even if you're a 19-year-old, even if you're a 20-year-old and you're not quite sure what that means to have your feet under you as an adult.

The vision he gives here is that they have their hope set on God. Think about our 8-year-olds. Think about our 4-year-olds. Think about our 14-year-olds. That they have their hope set on God. This is more than just information. They need information. That's fundamental to having faith: having the understanding, the knowledge, the info, about who God is and what he has done through Jesus.

But this knowledge about God has become their hope. It's what they're looking to for identity. It's what their hearts are longing for and what they're finding their purpose is, what he has done for them. Also it says here they're not forgetting about his works. Think about the way we try to keep memories in our minds and hearts and close to our affections. I even do this with my children. I want them to know things we've done so it's not just a wasted trip to the Fort Worth Zoo.

It's so sad to me... When you become a parent, it's like, "We took you to do this, and you don't even remember." It's like, "Do you remember that?" "No, I don't." Isn't that sad? So you figure that out enough where you're going, "Okay, I'm going to make sure you remember this, and I'm going to try to do this by exciting your memory, by saying, 'Hey, remember when we did this? Remember what happened there?'"

Whether you're a kid or an adult, we all do this, and part of what it's saying here is that their memory has not forgotten. There's a generation whose hope is set on God, and their memories are alive with the beauties of who God is and what he has done for them. They don't forget, because their minds are actively thinking about, their imaginations are inclined toward him.

It also says here they're living in light of his commands. His beautiful design we've talked about and his desire for their lives... They are obeying that. They're saying, "God, yes, I receive that, I believe that, and I'm living in light of that, and I'm living in light of it with steadfastness and faithfulness." As I think about our children and I look out among our culture, those two words stuck with me this week as I was preparing, just to have a generation that is faithful and steadfast.

What does it look like for our 3-year-olds or our 13-year-olds to show back up in this room at 23, steadfast and faithful? Not having been blown about by the winds and the waves and the expectations and the frustrations and even the oppression of those around them, not having their hearts dismayed by the fear of man, but they are steadfast in their hope and faithful in their perseverance in the things of God. That's the vision we want for our next generation.

Church, this is what we want to pray toward, that there wouldn't be a one of those 350 that this is not a part of their lives, because nothing less is at stake here than the actual future of the church. This isn't some sort of church growth thing, where we're going, "Hey, we need to aim young as we look at the culture." It's like if we don't aim young as a church, if we don't structure ourselves as a church body to be discipling the next generation, there will be no church for the next generation to have a witness.

This is about the kingdom of God. This is the way God has structured his people and what he has told us to do, so that from generation to generation his kingdom will be professed and witnessed to. We want that. We long for that, for our own children, but also, if you think about Denton, we want Denton to have that. We want these other cities where our kiddos will end up to have that witness.

So how do we as a church partner with the parents of our congregation to nurture these things? Because we can't control it. All we can do is be as faithful as we know how to do. So how do we do that? I think, firstly, it starts right now, tonight, and in the days ahead as we think about these things, with you and me just seeing from the Bible and receiving from the Bible the call on our community to be about this.

Just firstly to see that this is really important and it's really important to God and God has called you and me, regardless of where we are in our life stage, to be a part of training the next generation, telling and commending the kingdom of God. Until we see that, nothing is going to happen. We can get up here and talk about it. We can nod our heads. But unless, from the Lord, we see his wisdom

and the way he has designed the church and the family to do this and the role he has for me and you in that, we're never going to do it.

We're going to continue to come in here, and it's going to be about us, for the most part. Sundays are going to be about us. The church is going to be about us. Even as you think about this sort of consumer Christianity mindset, where this individualism seeps in, where it's just about us coming and sort of getting our spiritual goods and services doled out, and we never make it to this point. How sad that is.

Literally, people are arguing and bickering and going from church to church to church based on preferences about music or a hundred other things. Meanwhile, there's a whole generation of 300 to 350 children to be contended for, and we're just over here bickering about our preferences. That is devastating. It's a devastating reality, where it's like, "Wow."

So until we see that and sense, "Oh, the Lord has called us into this for our joy and for the good of these children and, ultimately, for the glory of God covering the earth like the waters cover the seas," nothing is going to happen. But hopefully, as we sense that, then we begin to pray. It leads us firstly into prayerfulness, because again, we're powerless, really, to create this sort of reality in the lives of the next generation. So we pray to God.

Even as we've structured our prayers corporately at elder-led prayer, as we pray here on Sundays during our intercession time, even as we introduce children at the Celebration Services, I just need you to know there's a reason we're doing that. It's not because we couldn't think of anything else to do in the Celebration Services. We're subtly but very intentionally saying, "This is important. We need to pray for the children of the next generation. We need to celebrate that and receive that responsibility."

Then, of course, even you personally, as you pray for the church, as you pray for the next generation, say, "God, this is a beautiful calling. Would you help us, and would you teach these children to know you and love you?" So we pray, and then prayer begins to move into vision. When you're praying about these things, when you're sensing God's desire for this, all of a sudden you have new eyes to see.

You're walking around this room and seeing the children, or walking around this building, or even walking around town and bumping into members of the church, coming up to the dinner on

Wednesday nights before elder-led prayer, and you have a whole new vision for these rug rats who are running around.

This is a person made in the image of God. Right now they're doing whatever they're doing, and they're into their Transformers and their Legos and Starship Troopers and all that, but the reality is they are on their way to being a disciple of something. You begin to see that, and when you see that opportunity, then you begin to be led into engaging. Our compassion and our love and our prayers begin to compel us into engaging in those relationships, building relationships, and then contending for this next generation.

In contending for this generation, again, you're contending for a witness of the gospel into this culture that's really, really dark. The apostle talks about "like stars in the midst of a dark generation." This is what we want. In our contending, that's the vision we have before us. You see this happening all over the place in our church. I just want to say, by and large, we're doing a great job. This is more of an encouragement.

I think about specific examples of what this looks like in our church. I think about Rene Martinez who is a member of our church, has been for a long time. He teaches Little Village in the 3-year-old room. If you're a parent who has had or will have a daughter who goes to the 3-year-old room, you'll know "Mr. Nay-Nay." That's what my kids call him. Because every 3-year-old little girl has a massive crush on Mr. Nay-Nay in the 3-year-old room.

So they come in. They love him. They're shy. They're there. They're drawn to him. And you know what? He's stewarding that so well. Not just with the girls, obviously, but with all of the children God has given him. There's something about him, and he's using... He's not married. He doesn't have kids, but he just said, "Listen. This is important, and whatever I can do to steward this."

He's these kids' hero. As a parent, I'm so thankful for that, that he gets to come alongside, and just because my daughter thinks he's cute, then he can sort of take her and say, "Yeah, Jesus came to save sinners like me and you." I don't know how he makes that bridge, but he's doing it, and they're listening in a way that they may not be listening to us. That's one example.

I think of another one, Misha who's in here. How long have you been serving in middle school, Misha? Six years. They're all in high school. Are any of them in college? Yeah, so some of the middle school girls she was discipling are now in college, and she's still in touch with them. Again, Misha

has her undergrad degree, just finished her grad degree, and while she's here at UNT doing that, she said, "Okay, this is an opportunity, and this is an area where I can serve," and she has served faithfully. I think about these young women who, again, have a model. They have someone to look to in our church.

Another example is John who serves in Little Village. He also serves in the 3-year-old room. There was a dad who had just gone through a messy, messy divorce, and he had gotten custody of his 3-year-old little boy and his 2-year-old little boy. He was in a place where he worked nights, and the childcare at nights while he was at work... His mom got really sick, so she couldn't take care of the kiddos anymore.

So he just shared that with John, I think mostly as a prayer request, and John took it upon himself, gathered some other members of the church, and just stepped in, and for a month or so met that need. I heard about it like two months later. "Hey, did you know so-and-so was doing this and serving this?" No, I had no idea. It allowed that dad to get his feet under him until they moved down to San Antonio and could get stable in that reality.

Again, he's thinking about these things. He saw the need. He engaged and served. We'll never know the significance of that for that massive transition in those kids' lives. We think they don't understand. We think they don't really get what's going on. Studies have shown, and I've seen this, where children when there's a massive transition, even though they're nonverbal, will stop eating for weeks at a time, because that's how they'll process. So they know. To be able to step in, even at that place, and shape and mold and plant seeds and water those seeds...

Another example is Ben and Jade. They don't have children, but they're friends with many people here in the congregation, and many of their friends have begun to have children. They just come alongside these families, first in friendship, but secondly in parenting. They're not just kind of there, laughing at the cuteness of the kids. They're doing that, and they're the most fun babysitters. At the same time, they're parenting. They're engaging. They're instructing these children. They're helping raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

On and on we could go. Looking around this room, so many of you are doing this well, but I think these are some of the examples of what this looks like among our church. If we all sort of had that mindset... Whether it's big or small, it doesn't matter, but it's just prayerfully being aware of these opportunities and saying, "Okay, Lord, however you might lead me, whatever opportunities you

might give me, I'm going to jump in there, and I'm going to contend. I don't know where it's going to lead or what's going to happen, but I'm just going to give of myself, because I see your heart for this, and I see your calling on my life for this."

I just want you to know that even as leaders of the church, we're thinking through how to structure our church. It's not just personal responsibility. The actual structures of our churches and organisms matter. Our elders, even this next spring, are going to have some pretty in-depth discussions about how to structure ministry to families, especially those in middle school and high school.

One of the things that's bearing out through a lot of research, both within the world of youth ministry and outside of it, is that the model of youth ministry for the last 40 years, this sort of segregated, age-segmented ministry that's highly programmatic... It's not altogether bad, but when it's just that, it has not formed the disciples it promised. There is sociological research with really big books and a whole lot of series coming out that are saying that.

So what do we do with the structures? How do we structure our middle school and high school ministry, where we are coming alongside parents and making disciples of middle school and high school students as best we can, so that when they end up in college, they don't end up not knowing how to be a part of the church, looking around and going, "Well, unless there's a big youth ministry for college students, I don't know how to engage. I don't know how to be a part of the people of God. I don't know how to walk out my faith, so I'll just quit," which is many of your stories. God has been gracious to bring you back around and into the family of faith.

We want to be as faithful as we can. So let's pray about these things. Let's think about these things. So that's the beginning of the conversation. I want you to see it, and I want to see it as an opportunity in a beautiful vein. I want to end tonight by praying for some specific groups of people here in the congregation. I'm going to ask you to stand up. I know some of you hate it. That's fine. Just get over it and stand up, and let's pray for you.

The first group I want to pray for is if you are a parent of a child in the next generation, will you just stand up so we can pray over you? Even if you're a caregiver, a grandparent who spends a lot of time with children, we'd love for you to stand up as well. Then also if you are serving formally or informally consistently among our body to care for the next generation and to partner with parents

in discipling them, will you stand up next to these parents? Those of you who serve in Little Village, Kids Village, this is all of you. Just stand up. We want to pray over you.

This is the picture we're going for, that it's not just the parents; it's all of us together, although the parents are the tip of the spear in that. I want to pray that the Lord would bind us together in this and that we see we're all on the same team and he has brought us together for this purpose. Let me pray.

If you're around these people, if you feel comfortable, I'd love for you to stand up and go lay a hand on their shoulder, and let's just pray. Let's just lay hands on each other and pray tonight that the Spirit of God would really accomplish what we're asking and hoping in the lives of our children, but, of course, in our own hearts as well.

Father, thank you for these moms and dads, these grandmas and granddads, these aunts and uncles who are standing. Lord, we pray that even right now in this moment you would encourage them, that you would remind them of the awesome privilege and responsibility you have entrusted to them to make disciples. It's so easy to forget that in the midst of all the activity and the reality of the day-to-day in parenting, Lord.

So right now would you remind them of this vision you have for them to be training their children? God, would you let them know that you are their help? Where they feel confused or where they don't know quite what to do, I pray they would feel the sense that, "Man, just join the club, and let's go to the Lord about this." So give us wisdom as parents. Lord, I thank you for these men and women who are standing alongside them who are currently serving our church week in and week out, day in and day out, to raise them up, to help the parents disciple their children.

We bless you for these men and women, and we pray that would become more and more the sort of lifestyle of our church, that we would be about this good work together. So Lord, would you just do away with any sort of mindset, any sort of division in our church that has the families over here and the kids over here, and then we're this age group and we're kind of over here. Lord, we're a family. We are one. So would you make us one, even in these things. We pray and we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

There's one more group I wanted to pray for, and that is the group that is vocationally or otherwise laboring and serving the next generation in our city who are not a part of this community of faith or

any community of faith. This week... Some of you may have heard about this. Most of you probably didn't. Guyer High School is a high school here in town, and there was a young man named Max who committed suicide this week, just a devastating story.

He was a believer. He had come to faith. The reason we know that is because with Max, as well as some of the others over there... I think this is five in the last... I can't remember the span of time, but five suicides at that high school. Max was being disciplined by some members of our body here who work and are on staff for Young Life. I got to talk to them this morning and throughout the week.

Also, he was being counseled by a member of our church who's a counselor, and one of his teachers is a member of our church. Then there are even families in our church who are significantly connected to this family. So this is devastating. We have the responsibility to disciple those within our midst, but at the same time to not be looking up and out and to be looking at those who are spiritual orphans in our community and not be mindful of those within our body who, day in and day out, are laboring in those spheres of influence.

So if you're a teacher, if you're a coach, if you're a CPS worker, obviously if you work for a parachurch ministry, if you're Young Life, YoungLives, or any sort of field like that, would you just stand so we could pray for you? I know some of you teachers are doing great, because it is break and you've made it. So even as you enter into a week, I want to pray over you in that and just thank God for you.

What you do... I know you know this. You don't need me to tell you this. What you do matters. It matters significantly. There are very few callings in life that are more significant than what you're doing. So we just thank God for you and pray for you more than you'd imagine, but wanted to express that here tonight. So if you're around them, can we just gather around? Let's lay hands on them and pray for them as well, that God would strengthen them and encourage them and remind them of what he has led them into as a vocation and why it's good.

Father, we thank you for these men and women who all day long have stood and yet again tonight in this service and ask, O God, that you would renew them. Having been a teacher and, at some level, understanding to some degree what they do, it is exhausting. It can be discouraging. Obviously it's life giving.

Lord, I pray that whatever vision initially led them into this field, this vocation, this calling, you would remind them of that tonight, that you would refresh them where they're weak, that you would comfort them where they feel discouraged, that you would lift up their hearts to believe that you're using them where they have come to doubt that and where it has just become a job. O God, would you draw near to these brothers and sisters?

I pray even for those who are heading into a break this week, that this would be a break where, Lord, they would come out of it and go, "Man, that week of that year, the Lord met me and refreshed me and renewed me and reminded me that he's with me and he cares for me." Thank you again, Lord, and we pray you would use them for your kingdom, use them as they serve and as they seek the welfare of our community, especially the next generation. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

I'll just finish with this. There's a story in church history. It sort of encapsulates and summarizes so much of what we've talked about. A guy named Eusebius was a church historian, and he wrote a long time ago about the apostle John. He talked about this child the apostle John entrusted to an elder of the local church. Apparently, this child came to faith, professed faith, was baptized, and then later on in life, this child wandered away and rebelled against the faith and joined a gang of thieves, a gang that was not up to anything good.

The historical account talks about that when John heard about this, the apostle mounted his horse and personally pursued the young man. This is the picture we're talking about, the culture we want in our homes and in our church. He got on his horse and pursued the young man. He rode into the mountains, and he called the young man to repentance.

This is what he said. "Why, my son, do you flee from me, your own father, unarmed, aged? Pity me, my son. Fear not. You still have hope of life. I will give an account to Christ for you. If need be, I will willingly endure death, as the Lord suffered death for us. For you I would give up my life. Stand and believe. Christ has sent me." If the Lord would put that heart... Never mind the form of that, getting on your horse and going into the mountains, but the heart. This is my responsibility to be an ambassador for God, to call people to reconciliation.

Lord, would you do that in our church? That we're just walking around, and the ethos that people sense and we know of for our children is one of love, and a love that leads to that sort of service and calling in encouraging and nurturing faith in the next generation. Of course, he's just following after

the example of Jesus. That's nothing but going after the one. That's nothing but being mindful of, "I'll lay down my life, because what else would I do but what the Lord has done for me?"

Father, we pray that as we continue this conversation in the days and weeks and years ahead, that you would really make us a church, God, that cares deeply for the next generation. I pray especially for those in this room that tonight is really the first time they've ever had a thought about this. Maybe it's because they don't have kids. Maybe it's because they had kids a long time ago and they're sort of through that stage of life.

But this reality that as a congregation, Lord, we want to be faithful in commending your goodness and your glory and your works to the next generation. So we pray that among our children, Jesus Christ and what he has done would be alive in their imaginations and memory, that it would be where their hope is totally set. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.