



Growing Young

Matt McCauley – November 19, 2017

If you have a Bible this morning, you can open that up to Deuteronomy, chapter 6. That's where we're going to be. If you do not have a Bible or didn't bring one, there should be one in the seat back in front of you. You can grab that one, and if you don't own a Bible, take that one home with you. That is our gift to you. No one is going to chase after you to try to get it back when you leave. I highly recommend it. It's a best seller. So please take that and check that out when you get some time at home to yourself to read it.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Matt McCauley. If you invited a friend this weekend to church and told them Matt was preaching, technically you were telling the truth. I want to introduce my family. That's my beautiful wife Ashley. We've been married for a little over six years, and we have two boys, Wyatt and Gunnar. Gunnar's birthday is tomorrow, and he will be 2, and Wyatt's birthday is in December, and he will be 4. They are our outlaws. Let me call them our little outlaws.

I have the joy of serving on staff here as the family minister, and I love working with families, because the Lord has put a deep angst and burden in my heart for the next generation for them to come to know and love the Lord in the same way I have come to know and love him. One of the primary ways we see that happening in Scripture is through the family, through the efforts of Mom and Dad and those who are responsible in the home of children, and that's a beautiful thing.

Most Family Worship Weekends we spend some time talking about that, and that is good and right. But there is also an element we're going to talk about this morning in the sense that we, as a church family, brothers and sisters in the Lord, are responsible for the next generation that is in our midst; that we as adults, whether we have children or not, whether they are young or old or have moved out of the house, we as a body have a corporate, collective responsibility for the next generation the Lord has in our midst.

I thought what a perfect weekend to spend some time thinking about that, because this morning they literally are in our midst. If you are an elementary-aged child who typically isn't in here, I want you to look up at me. I'm going to give you a chance to get the wiggles out a little bit, because we're going to have a service this morning, and you guys are going to give me your best attention and listen.

The way I'm going to give you an opportunity to get the wiggles out is if you're sitting next to someone you know, an adult who brought you, I want you to look over at them and give them a fist bump and say, "I'm glad I'm here." A fist bump or a high five. Awesome. Good deal. We are glad you're here, kiddos. We're so glad you're here.

Here's what I'm going to ask of you during our time together. I'm going to ask that you do your best to try to pay attention. Not necessarily to me, but try to pay attention to what the Lord is saying as we read his Word, which hopefully you have in your lap, as we look at the Scriptures, as we hear from God, that you would pay attention to what God is saying. I have some fun things in store for you.

Because you're in here this morning, there are a couple of parts in this service that are going to be *your* parts, a couple of times in the service that we're going to ask you to say some things out loud, to read some things on the screen, so I want you to be ready for those. I want you to be on the edge of your seat, and I'll give you a heads-up. Adults, there are some parts for us as well. There are going to be some parts in the reading today that we're going to participate in, so be ready for that.

If you are a guest with us this morning, you have come on a special morning. This is called Family Worship Weekend. What that means is that while we typically have elementary-aged programming for our kids during the service, twice a year at Family Worship Weekend we close those doors, turn those lights off, and all of those elementary-aged kids are welcomed and celebrated into this service. That's a beautiful thing and a good thing, and let me tell you why we do that.

The reason we do that is this is the endgame. This is where they will end up. It is good that they're in Little Village. It is so good that they're in Kids Village. We have some of the most godly, intelligent, smart, Jesus-loving people in our Little Village and Kids Village ministries who week in and week out are telling them about Jesus and teaching them the Scriptures, but it's not good for them to stay in there forever.

There will be a day when they are in here, and we think it is good and right to start introducing them into this space, because we don't want this space and what the Lord does week in and week out in this space to be a mystery to them. They need to see it. They need to experience it in the same way we as adults do. So we are trying to build this catalogue of God-saturated memories within our children's minds of what I call "big church." We want them to have those memories.

I have those memories. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a family that went to church every weekend. I would go to Sunday school, and then my family would attend service together. We would go to big church together, and I have a lot of fun memories from that time. There are many things that went over my head that I didn't really understand or comprehend at the time, but the Lord formed these memories in my heart of worshiping the Lord and seeing adults worship the Lord that have influenced my life today, and I want to share a couple of them with you this morning.

The first one is probably my favorite, and it's when I went to service to take Communion for the first time. I was in first grade, and I accepted Christ that summer at vacation Bible school and had gotten baptized, and because of that, my dad felt like I was ready to now start taking Communion. So we went to church on Sunday night, which is when we did Communion, and I remember going in there really, really excited about what I was about to get to do.

I sit down. I'm in first grade. I think I was 7 years old at the time. They get these shiny gold plates out that I had never seen before, and I was like, "Man, whatever is in there is important. That's a gold plate." They passed them down the aisle, and I remember when it went in front of me I looked at what was in the plate, and right as I did I remember the pastor saying, "And this is the body of Christ," and I thought, "Are you serious? How did we get this, and why are we passing it out?"

But he said to take one, so I did. Then I took another one and stuck it in my pocket, because the next day at school, Monday...every Monday was show and tell. So I brought that piece of bread, Jesus' body, with me to class, and I could not wait to blow everyone's mind in my class by showing them the body of Jesus. I remember standing in line. I'm waiting for little Sally to hurry up, wrap talking about her My Little Pony, or whatever she had brought that day, because I had Jesus' body.

She finishes. I remember standing up in front of the class. I pulled it out of my pocket. "This is Jesus' body." All the kids just... Minds blown. My teacher in the back lost it. She's a believer. She starts just laughing. She's rolling on the floor. I was really confused about her response. I was like, "This is not funny. This is serious. You need to pay attention."

She had a relationship with my parents because they're both teachers, and apparently she couldn't wait until the end of the day to call them, because when I got home from school my parents sat me down and said, "Hey, Matt, I think we need to have a conversation about Communion and what it is and what it isn't." We did, and it was really, really helpful, but love that story.

Another really fun story, good story I have of growing up going to big church as a child is that the church my family attended... We ended the service the same way every weekend. Every weekend we would close out in the exact same way. We would all hold hands, pew to pew. We would cross the aisles and hold hands. I loved trying to position myself on the end of a pew. I liked being in the aisle holding hands. Like, I wasn't supposed to do that, but I could in this moment.

We would all hold hands, and we would sing the same song every weekend before we were dismissed. I can't remember the verses, but the chorus went something like "We're the family of faith." I love that song. I remember parts of that song, and it had some significance to me at the time, because the church I attended was called Faith Baptist Church. So I thought, "Oh yeah, we're the family of Faith," and I was like, "That's sweet."

But it had a much deeper meaning I didn't understand until later. Yes, we were Faith Baptist Church, but we were literally spiritually a family of faith, a family of brothers and sisters in the Lord who had gathered together on a Sunday to worship and celebrate our good King and our heavenly Father, the same heavenly Father we all shared. We were a family of faith. Faith family, this morning I want us to think about the next generation in our midst, because they are all of our responsibility.

Whether you are a parent or not, the little ones who are in this room and the teenagers and the young people, their spiritual well-being... We need to feel the weight of that, because we're going to see in the Scriptures that it's not just Mom and Dad, it's not just the home, it's not just parents, but it is the congregation, the corporate assembly, the family of faith that is responsible for the next generation.

So as we read Deuteronomy 6 and you see the words *children* or *sons and daughters*, don't check out if you don't have kids or if your kids are grown. Feel the weight of the next generation in our midst as we read the passage. So, Deuteronomy, chapter 6. I'm going to set it up really quickly before we

actually start reading. If you're not familiar with the Scriptures, the book of Deuteronomy is the final book of the Torah, the books Moses wrote.

We're closing out this really big chunk at the beginning of the Bible about God redeeming and rescuing his people out of Egypt. We spent a lot of time this past sermon series, *Exodus*, talking about it. If you're not familiar, go check out the podcasts. We talked about Moses and God using Moses to lead his people out of slavery, out of Egypt, into the wilderness to Mount Sinai, and he gives them the Law and covenants with them to be their God and they will be his people.

Sadly, that generation, the generation that had been led out of Exodus, disqualified themselves from being able to enter the Promised Land God had said he would give them. Because of their rebellion and their hard-heartedness at Mount Sinai in the wilderness, God said, "You're not going to go in" to this generation. So another generation comes.

In the book of Deuteronomy we see Moses retelling the Law, retelling the covenant to this new generation. In fact, the word *Deuteronomy* actually comes from a Greek word that means second law. It's not a new law. He's just retelling the Law that was given. So if you wonder why you see the Ten Commandments both in Deuteronomy and in another book, it's because it was being told again to the next generation. So that's what the book of Deuteronomy is.

We're going to start in Deuteronomy, chapter 6. I'm going to read most of it, and then, kids, you're going to have a part. There's a part for you to read. It's going to be up on the screen, so I want you to watch for it. I'll give you a heads-up, and I want you when we get there to read it as loudly as you can so all of the adults can hear it. Then right after that, adults, we're going to have a part, a way to respond. Deuteronomy, chapter 6, starting in verse 4.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth." Skip down to verse 20. Kids, get ready. Your part is going to be up on the screen.

"When your son asks you in time to come..." Let's read this aloud together. **"...What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ..."** Adults, here's our response. **"...then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes.**

And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us."

Then Deuteronomy, chapter 7, is this really, really firm warning. It's this caution to the people of God about what they must do when they enter the land. The Lord says, "When you cross over and when you take the land, there will be some foreign gods, some false gods, some idols, some altars, and you must tear them down. You must completely remove them and eliminate them and be rid of them, because if you leave them, if you don't tear down these altars to these false gods, they will become a snare, a trap for your sons and daughters."

So he gives this warning, and then the book of Deuteronomy closes, the last chapter, with this picture of frail and old Moses being brought up to a mountain top. This mountain overlooks the

Promised Land. The Jordan is beneath it. Moses looks, and God says, **"This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you [Moses] see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.' So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD..."**

The book of Deuteronomy closes. Then the next book, Joshua, opens, and we see Joshua, this mighty warrior for the Lord, take up the torch and carry the mantle from Moses and lead God's people into the Promised Land, across the Jordan. If you know your Bible, you know the first thing he encounters is that Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. They take the land, and the book of Joshua is this victorious, climactic book where God's people finally are in the land God has promised them, and things are looking up.

Then we get to the book of Judges, and the book of Judges does *this*, and we're going to see why. We're going to see what happened to the people of God after they entered the land and failed to fully obey God. Judges, chapter 2. As we read this, I want you to pay careful attention to what happens to the next generation after Joshua. We're going to start in verse 1.

"Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.'"

But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of

Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they [the next generation] were in terrible distress."

This word *distress* carries the idea and gives the picture of being tied up, of being bound. While this next generation was free physically from slavery and was no longer in Egypt, they were back in bondage, spiritual bondage. They were slaves. They had been caught in the traps of these false gods and these foreign idols the Lord had warned the previous generation to completely remove. So you see, adults, the spiritual well-being of the next generation, of children, is so much dependent upon our full devotion to the Lord.

I love this quote from a theologian. He says, "This text [Judges 2] is a witness to the apparent failure of the community to keep alive its memory of Yahweh's gracious saving acts. The priests had failed in their instructional duties, and the elaborate system of festivals, memorials, and other customs designed to pass on the rich spiritual tradition had either lapsed or been reduced to formality.

If the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) was being recited at all, the following injunctions to the community to instruct the children in the fundamentals of covenant faith were obviously regarded more in the breach than in the observance. When people lose sight of God's grace, they lose sight of God and the sense of any obligation to him. All that follows in the book [of Judges] is a consequence of Israel's loss of memory."

I wrote it like this: "Half-hearted devotion in one generation resulted in full-fledged rebellion in the next." I want to read the rest of this exactly how I wrote it. "There's a direct correlation between lack of devotion and the spiritual well-being of the next generation. Men, we cannot separate our own personal sin from the struggles plaguing our boys and young men. Women, you cannot divorce your iniquities from the poor choices our girls and young women are making. The Scriptures do not give us that luxury. They are not asking for perfection, but they are pleading for holiness, for red-hot devotion to our King, Jesus."

For the rest of our time this morning, I want to pull us out of the book of Judges and put us in our time today, and I want us to think about the next generation. In order to do that, we have to define the reality that is before us in terms of their spiritual state and where they are with the Lord. I'm going to talk about some statistics, some realities, about the young people, about the next generation, and my hope is not to be an alarmist.

I don't want to create fear. I don't want to instill any kind of fear. I want to define a reality, and then I want to offer hope. Our God is not a God of fear; he's a God of hope. I want to instill some hope this morning. So I want you to listen to the current state of the next generation of young people when it comes to their spirituality.

The first thing I want to say is that if you take a look at all of the churches across the United States denominationally, if you look at every major Christian denomination in the United States and look at their attendance and participation, every single one of them currently is either plateaued or is declining. No major Christian denomination in the United States is growing. They are all shrinking or they have plateaued.

The next one is about young people and their population. If you take a look at the total population in the United States, almost a quarter of the population of the United States is made up of young people ages 15 to 29. So, one out of four in the United States is a young person, but if you take a look at the church population within the United States, only one out of ten people belong to this age range.

So while they represent one-fourth of the population outside of churches, within churches young people only represent one out of every ten people. If you want to make this personal and talk about The Village Church, The Village Church Flower Mound Campus has 3,200 covenant members. So

3,200 people have covenanted with this place to be members. Of those 3,200, only 177 are under the age of 26.

The last thing I want to share hits me personally in a really significant way, because I've spent almost two decades of my life, almost all of my adult life working with the next generation in some form or fashion, serving middle school, serving high school, working with teenagers, working with families and parents. Here's the reality: of those who actively attended church in childhood and adolescence, one half are not involved after high school graduation.

Of children and adolescents who were active in church as a child or adolescent, after high school, one out of two, one half, are no longer attending, no longer active. What's really hard for me when I see this graphic is that I can look at those dotted outlines and I can literally fill them in with faces and names of students I have known, who I have seen, who have been in this place and come to our Bible studies and been in our worship services and after high school are no longer here and are no longer plugged into a church wherever they might be at college, and it breaks my heart.

When I think about their parents, many of whom I know personally and have prayed with and sought the Lord that their child might return, might come back, it breaks my heart. I feel like in this moment, because of how personal this one is, I want to speak to some of those parents. Some of them I know and some of them I don't. If this is the reality you are living with your son or your daughter, I want to encourage you to continue praying in faith.

Continue pleading for your son or daughter to return to the faith of their childhood, and have hope, because here's what I've seen. This is true. I've read this. Many of them return. The Lord will use some significant life event, whether marriage or having children or sometimes even a painful tragedy, to bring them back to the faith of their childhood, to bring them back into the church they have abandoned for a season. So have hope. Continue to pray. Your efforts, your prayers, your energy is not for naught.

The Lord hears those prayers. The Lord answers those prayers. So continue to pray, and, church, let's do that collectively. Let's pray for these high school students as they graduate, as some of them leave this place. These are staggering statistics, but it's necessary for us to know that. Church, I want you to know, I want you to have hope that we as leadership are aware of this, and in addition to praying and pleading to the Lord to help us engage young people better, to help them discover our church and love our church and love the God we worship...

In addition to praying, we have sought some outside help to address this issue. I'm excited to tell you that we are currently partnering with Fuller Seminary and some really, really smart and godly people out in California. (Yes, there are real Christians out in California. The gospel is alive and well out on the West Coast. There's nothing to fear.) We have partnered with some people out there who have spent a lot of time studying this, spent a lot of time thinking about young people, thinking about churches and what draws young people into churches.

The Fuller Youth Institute spent about four years studying this and trying to answer these questions. What can churches do to become more effective with young people? Who and where are the most innovative churches in the country when it comes to engaging young people well, and how might we learn more about them? They took all of that effort and all of those hours and hours of study and put them together in a book they call *Growing Young* that most of our staff is reading.

Basically, what they experienced in churches that were growing young (this is what they call these churches that are doing really well when it comes to young people)... They identified six core commitments that are at the heart of these churches that seem to be what the Lord is using to draw young people in and to keep them. So I'm going to briefly share with you what these six things are.

I'm not going to go into a lot of detail, but just know that our church is aware of them, that our church is thinking about them, that our church is seeking help to know how we can be better at doing these things, because we care about young people. We want that 177 number to go way up. So here are the six things that *Growing Young* and the people at Fuller have identified when it comes to engaging young people.

The first one is something they call *unlocking keychain leadership*. Here's what they mean by this. Churches that are growing young are inviting young people into that church not just to observe or sit but to participate. They are saying to young people, "Hey, we don't want you to just be on the sidelines. We don't want you just to be in the stands.

We want you to be on the field with us, and here's how we're going to do that. We're going to empower you. We are going to give you the keys to this church [the keys symbolizing power, authority, and influence], and we are going to trust you to start making some decisions and start leading. Not just participating but really leading within this church."

Young people love that. They want that opportunity. They're waiting for an older person to say, "Hey, I see this in you, and I think the Lord is going to use it, so I'm going to give you some influence and some authority and the figurative keys to the church to be able to extend that out." It just seems to be something that is working and that the Lord is using.

The second one is that churches that are growing young *empathize with today's young people* really well. In the *Growing Young* book I love the way they phrase this. As an adult, it's changing our language. Instead of saying things like, "Well, when I was your age..." these churches are saying, "Hey, tell me more. Help me understand that. Help me understand this. Why do you think that way? Why do you see the world that way? Why do you care so much about this?"

These churches are listening to young people. They are empathizing with young people, trying to get into their shoes. I think of it like this. Do we have any gardeners in the house? Anybody try to grow things? Okay, a few. My wife and I have a garden in our backyard. Thankfully, we don't have to live off of it, because that wouldn't work, but occasionally we get some nice things we can try to eat.

When we plant a seed in the garden and it doesn't produce or doesn't grow, I don't go out there and dig up the seed and go, "What's your problem? Why can't you figure this out? Why aren't you growing?" I don't do that to the seed. The first thing I do is go, "Gosh, what's wrong here? Am I watering it enough? Is the soil right? Is it getting enough sunlight? Something is off here in this environment for this seed not to produce, not to do what it was designed to do."

Instead of judging or blaming or pointing the finger at young people, it's helpful to think about their environment, to think about the context they're growing up in. Now don't hear me say they are innocent. We know from the Scriptures that we are born with sick hearts, and those sick hearts influence the way we make decisions, and we have a bent toward sin.

I don't want to ignore that reality, but could it be the reason young people make the choices they do or have the worldview they have is that they are growing up in a greenhouse that we, as adults, have created for them? They are growing up in the garden we put in place, and the reason they're coming out the way they are is because of what we have done or not done. So instead of judging them, we need to empathize. We need to understand. We need them to tell us more.

The third one... I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time here because of all of the six, this is the one that, according to our assessment, we are doing really well with, but it is important to mention.

Churches that are growing young *take Jesus' message seriously*. Churches that are growing young are not shy about the gospel. They are explicit. They are clear about who Jesus is, what he did, why he came, and why he is worthy of our worship.

They don't water down the message. They don't try to make it softer. They present the gospel clearly, as we see it in Scripture, and young people aren't repelled by that; they are drawn into that. While Christianity may be confusing, Jesus is magnetic, so when we present him clearly, young people are drawn into that. So these churches are serious about Jesus' message, and they take his message seriously.

The next one (I love this one) is churches that are growing young *fuel a warm community*. Churches that are growing young, when it comes to relationships, are warm places. The *Growing Young* people say *this*. This is kind of their tagline for it. They say, "Warm is the new cool." Here's what they mean by that.

Instead of these churches trying to figure out "What's the cool thing we can do to attract young people? Do we need to change the way we do worship? Do we need to change *this* or *this* or *this*? What do we need to change or modify to try to attract young people?" what they're finding is that young people are attracted to relationships. They are attracted to warmth, to knowing people, to being known, not just their peers but inter-generationally.

In fact, when they surveyed young people in these churches and asked them to describe their church, the phrase they used the most often was "My church is like my family." A family doesn't just have one age group in it. It has many, young and old, and young people want that. They want relationships with adults. The two ways they see this happening the most often is, first, in mentorship...one-on-one, face-to-face, "let me sit down with you" type relationships.

The other place they see this is within corporate worship. If you have a high school student, do you know what the most important thing is you can do for that high school student within the church walls that will have an impact and effect on their faith after high school? It's coming in *here* with them.

Main service worship, all-church worship, the research shows, is the most impactful thing when it comes to the faith of a high school student post high school. Why? Because they're not tucked away in some attic or youth space or whatever. They see more than that. They see the church. They see

adults. They see children. They see the generations worshipping the Lord together, and that's what they want. They want warm relationships.

Churches that are growing young *prioritize young people (and families) everywhere*. They say to ask yourself this question...*How far would you be willing to go, how much would you be willing to sacrifice for the sake of young people?* How much would you be willing to give as a church to reach them and to impact them with the gospel?

Anytime you use the word *prioritize* there's kind of a back edge to that, because what happens if you make one thing a priority? What about the rest of the stuff? If we start prioritizing *this*, what's going to happen to *this* and *this* and *this*? That's a genuine fear and a genuine thing to think about, but here's the fun stuff that *Growing Young* is discovering. Churches that prioritize young people and families everywhere... When they made that slice of the church pie...

Think about everything that goes into the church. Think about budget. Think about facility space. Think about programming. Think about volunteers. Think about personnel. When these churches made young people a priority and made that slice of the pie bigger, the other slices did not get smaller. What they saw over time is that the whole pie grew. The net return on the investment in young people was that the whole church experienced growth and flourished, so no one lost.

Finally, churches that are growing young want to *be the best neighbors*. What that means is that churches that are growing young, that are attracting young people and keeping young people, spend a lot of time thinking about what's going on outside of the church walls, not just what's going on within it. Churches that are growing young spend more time thinking about how they can be the best church *for* the community than they do trying to figure out how they can be the best church *in* the community.

Young people have a very high social conscience and awareness. If you spend any time around them, you know they care a lot about doing good and about helping others, and that's great. That's the gospel message. "Let's meet needs. Let's help. Let's minister. Then as we do that, let's point them to Jesus and point them to the hope they need to have in him." That categorizes churches that are growing young.

So all of these six things are things we are trying to work on at The Village Church. These are the things we want to do better, that we want to get better at, but I want to say this: none of those

things matter. We can spend all the time, energy, and effort on those things we want, but none of those will matter if we as adults within the church forsake our first love.

If our devotion to Jesus is half-hearted, if we don't fully tear down the idols and get rid of the altars, like the people of God were instructed to do, none of those things will matter, because the next generation will suffer spiritually because of it. So how do we do that? How do we keep those things in front of us? Well, we do that by remembering, by not forgetting, what the Lord has done for us.

I'm going to close out our time with another fun exercise. Kids, you guys have been great. I know this was a lot. I know this was long, but you have one more part. Are you ready for it? We're going to go back to Deuteronomy 6 and reword our questions. I want you to ask these questions, and, adults, we're going to respond by what's on the screen.

So, kids, here are your questions. We're going to read these together on the count of three. Are you ready? One, two, three. "Why do you study and memorize God's Word? Why do you sing to God, and why do you close your eyes or raise your hands? Why do you pray and thank God? Why do you drink juice and eat a tiny cracker at the end of big church? Why are those people getting dunked under water? Why do we try our hardest to go to church every week?"

Parents, here's our response, and say it like you mean it. "I was lost. I was sin's slave, far from the God who made me, and the Lord brought me out to bring me in. He saved me through his beautiful Son Jesus' sacrifice, and the Lord has done many more miracles in my life. He brought me a long way, far from who I used to be, and he promises always to keep me, never to let me return or fall back into slavery.

So I keep my eyes on Jesus, and I pray and hope with all of my heart that you will do the same. I sing because I'm glad. I raise my hands because I can't help it. Coming to church to worship with our church family is a priority for this family. We will not neglect meeting together. We will encourage one another as the day draws near." Children, young people, I want you to look at me and hear me say that during the 12 years since I have been here, I have seen the Lord do some miraculous things in our midst.

Fifteen years ago, this congregation was about 150 people meeting at a church across the street, and today it is a congregation of almost 11,000 gathering every weekend across five locations throughout DFW. And guess what? In a short amount of time, in a little less than five years, those

five locations are going to become five different churches, five different gospel outposts the Lord has strategically placed in the Metroplex so revival might come and so people might be saved.

In 2009, almost to the week, our lead pastor had a seizure. They rushed him to the hospital, and in his brain they found a two-inch stage IV malignant tumor. We were scared. We were scared for him, for his family, so we prayed and fasted together, and eight years later he is still here and that tumor is completely gone.

If you're an adult and you've been here for any amount of time, you have seen the Lord do some undeniably miraculous things in this place. You've seen some of those things and have experienced some of those things for yourself. So, adults, I'm going to ask you in a moment to be bold and to testify to the Lord's goodness and to the Lord's working in your life in front of our children so they can see it.

I'm going to ask some questions, and if this is true for you, if the Lord has done this, I want you to boldly testify to the Lord and raise your hands. As this happens, as people raise their hands, congregation, I want us to celebrate what the Lord has done, because he is good and he has done good.

If this is true, raise your hand. God physically healed or is in the process of healing since your time here at The Village. Raise your hand if this is true. Your marriage was saved or is in the process of getting the help it desperately needed since your time here at The Village. Raise your hand if you were rescued, if you found freedom from an addiction that had plagued you for a long, long, long time since you've been here at The Village.

Raise your hand if you got saved and/or baptized since your time here at The Village. Raise your hand if the Lord has done something in your life during your time here at The Village that is far beyond what you could have ever thought to ask or imagine. Raise your hand if the Lord saw and carried you through an unimaginable trial that you thought you would never face, but he was with you through the fire and through the storm and brought you through to the other side of it since your time here at The Village.

Those of you who are still praying for the Lord and asking for the Lord to do these things, continue to pray. The Lord hears every prayer. He counts and collects every tear, and he is good and does good and will answer. Children, this is the God we serve, and we as adults who love him want you to

love him. We want you to know him the same way we do. So here is when we say that. Here is when we testify to that.

Our hope and prayer for you is that you would love him with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength, all the days of your life. If you're sitting next to a young person who you brought, as we pray, would you just put a hand on their head? I'm going to read this prayer. It's not my prayer. It's the prayer of a man I love and respect and trust and who cares a lot about the next generation. Would you make this prayer I'm about to read your prayer as well?

Heavenly Father, would you save the children in our midst? Would you call them to yourself in the name of Jesus and by the power of your Holy Spirit? May we, as adults, love them in unconditional, grace-filled ways. May we use our words to bless, encourage, and to build up each one, and as we walk away, may we leave behind the aroma of Christ. In his name we pray, amen.