

Sunday, June 20, 2021

## May I come in...the Nursery?

(Message 2; Series: My Heart, Christ's Home)  
(Hosea 11:1-4)

### Scripture:

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.  
2 But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.  
They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.  
3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms;  
but they did not realize it was I who healed them.  
4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.  
To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek,  
and I bent down to feed them.*

### Message:

**Bob Benson wrote, *Laughter in the Walls*. It goes like this:**

*I pass a lot of houses on my way home—some pretty, some expensive, some inviting—but my heart always skips a beat when I turn down the road and see my house nestled against the hill. I guess I am especially proud of the house and the way it looks because I drew the plans myself.*

*It started out large enough for us—I even had a study—two teenaged boys now reside in there. And it had a guest room—my girls and nine dolls are permanent guests. It had a small room Peg had hoped would be her sewing room—the two boys swinging on the dutch door have claimed this room as their own.*

*It really doesn't look right now as if I'm much of an architect. But it will get larger again—one by one they will go away to work, to college, to service, to their own houses, and then there will be room—a guest room, a study, and a sewing room for just the two of us.*

*But it won't be empty—every corner, every room, every nick in the coffee table will be crowded with memories. Memories of picnics, parties, Christmases, bedside vigils, summers, fires, winters, going barefoot, leaving for vacation, conversations, black eyes, graduations, first dates, ball games, arguments, washing dishes, bicycles, dogs, boat rides, getting home from vacation, meals, rabbits, and a thousand other things that fill the lives of those who would raise five.*

*And Peg and I will sit quietly by the fire and listen to the laughter in the walls.*

**It is Father's Day today; like Mother's Day, it brings with it lots of issues, emotions and memories. It can be exciting or painful or both at the same time.**

**Two weeks ago, we started a series entitled, "My Heart, *Christ's Home*."** We talked about Christ coming into our heart, taking up residence and renovating our life. I assume you took and have begun reading the book; how many of you remember what Robert Munger wrote about the "nursery?" (It isn't in the book).

The Nursery is a place of incredible responsibility, deep nurture, and early development. It represents where we were **first loved** and where we **learn to love**... It's where parents learn to love their children. Going through the house, God wants ownership of every room – especially the Nursery.

## **THE SITUATION**

**Even in the best of families, being a parent is seldom a **Hallmark Card** experience.**

The social science research says: *"Being a parent does not lead to greater happiness. It is meaningful; it can be wonderful; but it is never easy; truth is, marital satisfaction actually decreases when a couple starts having children."*

In a classic study, parents were asked to rank nineteen common home activities. *Caring for children* didn't come in first or second. In fact, it came in 16<sup>th</sup> (of nineteen) - after talking on the phone, food preparation, watching TV, exercising, and even housecleaning!

We tend to **romanticize** and **idealize** what it might be like to be parents.

Thirty-eight years ago, we brought our first-born home from the hospital. We put him in a car seat; his body so tiny we propped him up with a blanket. I drove home slowly and carefully down side streets - with my hazard lights flashing (just kidding). I was now responsible for this tiny human being!

I pictured rocking him, watching him sleep, feeding him, holding his hand, teaching him to talk so he would constantly say, *"I love you, daddy. Thank you for being my daddy."* It didn't quite turn out like that. Apparently, I'm not a very great teacher ☺; I had no idea how selfish I was until I became a parent...

I can remember being desperate for sleep; when he cried, I can remember pretending I was still sleeping until Marilyn got up to diagnose the problem; I wasn't at all like Jesus.

I remember Marilyn saying, *"You have no idea what it's like to have someone to constantly clean up after, constantly feed, and be at their beckoned call ... and now, in addition to you, I also have to take care of this baby. It's exhausting!"*

Kids grow up; they go off to school, learn to drive, go on to college; but the truth is, you **never stop** being a parent...even when they are 38 years old! You are always their dad or mom; and I wouldn't change it for everything. Being a parent deeply impacted my life.

**John Ortberg once confessed to googling “Most disappointed parent in the world.”** He said a guy in Great Britain popped up. He had written a letter that went viral (Apparently, it's not unusual for parents to be disappointed in their children). Listen to a bit of it:

*“Dear Kids. It is obvious that none of you has the faintest notion of the bitter disappointment each of you has dished out to us...we are constantly regaled with chapter and verse of the happy, successful lives of our friends and relatives and being asked of news of our own children and grandchildren.*

*“I can tell you that I and Mum have had enough of being forced to live through the never-ending bad dream of our children's underachievement...I want to hear no more from any of you until, if you feel inclined, you have a success or an achievement or even a realist plan...I am bitterly, bitterly disappointed. Dad.”*

Ouch! Relationships are hard and often disappointing. But this dad is disappointed for fairly superficial reasons; he responds in a terribly inappropriate and hurtful way - something is missing.

**The Bible is the story of a parent who for good reasons is disappointed with his children - but He responds in a way beyond our comprehension - with unconditional and sacrificial love. He offers the life of his own and only Son.**

**Hosea 11:1 reads,** *“When Israel was a child, I loved him... [Every parent knows this feeling] and out of Egypt I called my son (Israel, you might remember, were slaves in Egypt and God led them out).*

But the more they were loved, the more they seemed to move away from God! [This is us!] *“They sacrificed to the Baals... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk...”* (Parents often have names/terms of endearment, for their children. “Ephraim” is one of God's terms of endearment for his children, Israel).

*“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them [i.e., they didn't acknowledge my love and care]. “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.”*

God: *When I claimed my little child Israel, they were nothing special. They were a bunch of ragged slaves. And then **I loved them...**and everything changed.”*

- I taught them to walk; I'd pick them up and hold them in my arms; I'd hold them close the way a loving parent does.
- They didn't know I was loving them - but every morning there was food on the table; every day their clothes were clean; every night they had a safe place to sleep.
- I had a wonderful plan for their life; I thought they'd be straight "A" students; make varsity in every sport; set up a successful business and fund my retirement! And fund my retirement! (Maybe some of my kids are listening to this message ☺)
- But when they got older, they seemed to think only about themselves; **they ran** after success, money, things, and their own happiness...and **left me** alone.

**God's response:** "*How can I give up on you? How could I ever let go...*"? So out of his unconditional love, God makes the **ultimate sacrifice** and sends his own and only Son to a **cross** - "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (**John 15:13**).

Paul writes in **Romans 5:8** - "*Christ demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*"

God loved us **regardless** of how we responded to him and his love – that is **unconditional love**; unconditional is the essence of good parenting and being a disciple of Jesus.

In our world, love is too often conditional. In our world, love is too often self-serving. "You please me, I'll love you." "You do me a favor; I'll do you a favor." "But if you hurt me, I'll hurt you back." That is not real love. Love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling; it is a commitment to love you no matter how you love me, treat me, or respond to my love. It is an unconditional commitment. It is sacrificial commitment. It is a selfless commitment.

Because of God's nature, he **can't stop loving** us; it's the nature of good parents; it's the nature of a Christ-follower. So, to paraphrase **Luke 18:8** - "*When Christ comes knocking on the door of your heart, will he find that same kind of unconditional and sacrificial love with which he loves you?*"

## THE STORY

The place in our heart where **love** should be most evident is **the Nursery**. How we embrace [our] children, the least of these, speaks volumes about how we love each other, our friends, co-workers, neighbors, and the stranger.

The disciples were convinced children were a nuisance when they wanted to interrupt Jesus, but Jesus told his disciples to step aside: *“Unless you become like one of these little ones, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

Children (young and old) need someone to love them unconditionally and sacrificially and if they don't find it in the right places (parents, extended family, church, a Christ-centered school), they start looking in all the wrong places (and there are plenty of them).

When our sons were little, we used to read a book to them. It might be familiar - even a bit corny - but there is a story behind it. Both the story and the story behind it are moving. Let me share it with you...

A mother held her new baby and very slowly rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she held him, she sang: *“I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living My baby you'll be.”*

The baby grew. He grew, and he grew, and he grew. He grew until he was two years old, and he ran all around the house. He pulled all the books off the shelves. He pulled all the food out of the refrigerator, and he took his mother's watch and flushed it down the toilet. Sometimes his mother would say, *'This kid is driving me CRAZY!'*

But at nighttime, when that two-year-old was quiet, she opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor, looked up over the side of his bed; and if he was really asleep, she picked him up and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him, she sang: *“I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living My baby you'll be.”*

The little boy grew. He grew, and he grew, and he grew. He grew until he was nine years old. He never wanted to come in for dinner, never wanted to take a bath, and when Grandma visited, he always said bad words. Sometimes his mother wanted to sell him to the zoo!

But at nighttime, when he was asleep, the mother quietly opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep, she picked up that nine-year-old boy and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she rocked him, she sang: *“I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living My baby you'll be.”*

The boy grew. He grew, and he grew, and he grew. He grew until he was a teenager. He had strange friends, and he wore strange clothes, and he listened to strange music. Sometimes the mother felt like she was in a zoo!

But at nighttime, when that teenager was asleep, the mother opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep, she picked up that great big boy and rocked him

back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him, she sang: *"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living My baby you'll be..."*

The teenager grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was a grown-up man. He left home and got a house across town.

Well, that mother, she got older. She got older and older. One day she called up her son and said, "You'd better come see me because I'm very old and sick." So her son came to see her. When he came to the door, she tried to sing the song. She sang: *"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always... But she couldn't finish because she was too old and sick.*

The son went to his mother. He picked her up and rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. He sang this song: *"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living my Mommy you'll be..."*

When the son came home that night, he stood for a long time at the top of the stairs.

Then he went into the room where his new baby daughter was sleeping. He picked her up in his arms and very slowly rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while he rocked her, he sang: *"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be."*

**Generations come and go; people are born and die. The song (like unconditional love) goes on and on...**

The guy who wrote this children's book is Robert Munsch. His life was not the Hallmark card kind. As a child he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder; as a fifth grader, he was depressed and suicidal; as a teen, he was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

In the process of medicating himself, he became an alcoholic and joined AA. He studied for seven years to become a Jesuit priest, but remained filled with doubts and darkness and never did become a priest. Instead, he got married. He and his wife had a baby; it was stillborn. They got pregnant again; it was another stillborn. They eventually adopted three children.

Robert Munsch never got to hold his baby in his arms - but he loved children and wrote children's books (This one has sold over 30 million copies!) - *"I'll write a story better than life,"* he had said, *"And in this story, love will be stronger than death."*

That's like what **Christ** did. He has an even **better** story.

## THE CONCLUSION

In the “Nursery Room” of our heart, Christ is looking for **evidence of unconditional, self-sacrificing, selfless love** in our life. That includes (but is not limited to):

**Your Prayer.** The best way for a parent to love their children is to **stay close** to Jesus. The best way to stay close to Jesus is to **spend time** with him daily in prayer; the best way to become better parents and better disciples is to ask for God’s assistance.

The best way for a parent to love their children is to **teach them** how to pray. This is best done by praying for them while they listen. This is best done by praying with them while they pray, as the parent listens. Sadly, most parents don’t pray much, and even less for their children; most will tell you they’re too busy; prayer is not the last resort, it is the first priority.

**Your Time.** The **best** thing you can offer your children (and others) is yourself - not your money, not just your wisdom, but your time; your incarnational presence - just be there; quality time is no substitute for quantity time.

**Your Encouragement** (affirmation). Parents should be their children’s biggest fan and **supporter**. Parents are the primary influencer in their child’s life - and in their faith life. The parent of the opposite sex of the child is the one who most impacts the child’s self-esteem; the parent of the same sex as the child is the one who most impacts their self-identity.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul** reminds us, not only as parents, but as followers of Jesus, to encourage one another and build each other up.

**Your Evangelizing.** Parents need to “**aim**” their children in the right direction. When the Psalmist says (**127:4-5**) children are “*like arrows in the hands of a warrior,*” he’s implying that our children need to be intentionally pointed toward Jesus. Parents are to lead their children to Jesus by their talk. Disciples are to make more disciples. We are to talk our walk and point our children and others to Jesus because he exemplifies unconditional and self-sacrificing love.

**Your Modeling.** Parents – all believers - need to constantly and consistently **walk** the Christian life. We need to walk our talk. Children need someone they can look up to, trust and depend on who will love them unconditionally. Young believers need someone to teach them. Albert Schweitzer said, “*Example is not the best way of teaching; it is the only way!*” Even if you don’t see the results immediately, you are making an impact.

**This is your heart. You can do this whether you have children at home, have had children in your home, hope to someday have children in your**

**home; or just remember what it was like to be a child in your home, if you let Jesus in to take **control** of your heart's **Nursery**.** Jesus is looking in the nursery of your heart for unconditional, sacrificial, selfless love. Will he find it?

This *song* came to Him. He sings it regularly to us: *"I'll love you forever. I'll love you for always! I'm the holy one; I'll write a story in your life where **love** is **stronger** than **death**."*

He did. We call the story, the **Gospel**. We can read it at the **cross**.

***Prayer: Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus...***

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