

## No Greater Joy

3 John 1-8

David Michael

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*The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. <sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. <sup>5</sup> Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup> For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.* 3 John 1-8 (ESV)

### Introduction

Unpacking a biblical vision for the next generations at College Park.

Picking up where Pastor Mark left off last week in his message from Romans 7:

- The vision of the Christian life as going up the down escalator is our vision for the next generation.
- That by the grace of God the blinded eyes of our children would be opened to the destruction at the bottom of the escalator and to the glory and the joy at the top.
- That by the grace of God they would turn, and fix their eyes on the beauty of the One who goes before them.
- And as they go, they would be well-equipped to walk in that way and to effectively and winsomely engage those going the other way with the gospel, for the sake of Christ.
- That they would be saturated with the Word of God—and with the sword of the Spirit in their hand they would fight the fight of faith all the way to the top, endure all the dangers, toils and snares, persevering, faithful to the end where they will meet their Savior and look into his radiant face as his voice resounds “well done, good, faithful, persevering servant”—enter into the JOY of your master.

**Consider the situation that prompted that John to make this amazing claim in:**

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 1:4

1. John's aim is to address a problem caused by Diotrophes, one of the leaders in the church who not only refused to welcome some traveling missionaries who were commended by John, but who was also expelling people from the church who showed hospitality to them.
2. As unhappy as John was about Diotrophese's behavior, he was very glad to hear that Gaius, by contrast was being faithful. He had welcomed these men who were strangers to him as brothers in the Lord and extended hospitality and care for them.

In verses three and four, John writes:

"For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**"

3. When John speaks of his children he is neither speaking biologically or developmentally, he is speaking spiritually.

This extreme joy that John has comes when we hear or observe that anyone, young or old, related or not is walking in the truth.

However this text certainly applies to our physical offspring and the children who are growing up among and my aim is for us to pursue the joy of witnessing these children embracing the truth and walking in it.

**How can John make such an extreme claim?**

1. **Because John treasured the truth himself**

2. **Because he feared God** and he knew what was at stake if his children did not follow in the truth.

John Angell James was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century pastor in England

But how it would embitter our last moments, and plant our dying pillow with thorns, to leave you on earth in an unconverted state; following us to the grave, but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, how could we sustain the dreadful thought...that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions, you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation? And when you had departed under such circumstances, what could heal our wounds or dry our tears." (p.38)

"What then, my children, are all worldly acquirements and possessions without piety?...Original genius, a vigorous understanding, a well-stored mind, and all this adorned by the most amiable temper and most insinuating address, will neither comfort under trials of life nor save their lovely possessor from the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. O! no: they may qualify for earth but not qualify for heaven."<sup>1</sup>

3. **Because John was seeing the fruit of his labor.**

For the believer who loves the truth, there is joy whenever we see any child of God walking in the truth whether we know them or not.

When God uses us to bring a person to faith in Christ we rejoice even more.

Our desire is that God give us many children at College Park! Children who are walking in the truth—in pursuing this aim we are pursuing our joy. Nothing will make us happier, nothing will give us more joy than when we see our children walking in the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> James, John Angell, The Christian Father's Present to His Children Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993(p.41)

4. **Because Gaius was walking in the truth**—not just standing in it.

Knowing and understanding the truth is crucial but it is of little use unless we are walking in it.

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we **say** we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (we don’t walk in the truth).” 1 John 1: 5-6

We want our children to know the truth but we must not be content until we see them walking in the truth.

God forbid that our children end up being Romans 1:21 people

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Or Isaiah 29:13 people who the Lord says :

"... draw near with their mouth and honor me while their hearts are far from me..."

**Three priorities** for experiencing this extreme joy with regard to our children

**Priority #1: We must be serious about imparting truth to our kids**

George Barna in his work: *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should be Your Church’s Number #1 Priority* identified four cornerstones<sup>2</sup> required in order to facilitate this kind of outcome:

**Cornerstone 1: The Bible** –established and understood as the only trustworthy source of wisdom and truth.

**Cornerstone 2: A Commanding Knowledge of Biblical Content.**

**Cornerstone 3: Identification of Organizing Principles**

*“Our research finds that most churches teach good biblical content but fail to tie it together into a logical, comprehensive framework that makes sense and provides practical counsel---we must*

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<sup>2</sup> Barna, George, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2003, pp. 67-69

*assist young people in connecting the dots of God's principles so that they draw a striking picture of truth and purpose without getting lost down the rabbit trails of spiritual intrigue. (pp. 68)*

#### **Cornerstone 4: A Burning Desire to Obey God**

*<sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (ESV)*

#### **Priority #2: Strategic Support, Encouragement and Equipping of Parents**

Barna explored in his research with the way churches measure success. Most, he said, pointed to “growing numbers of students enrolled, consistent attendance, completion of curriculum in the allotted time, parental satisfaction, minimal discipline problems, and the like.”

The most effective churches had very different “indicators of success.”

These churches were “experiencing the widespread involvement of parents in the spiritual development of children... The effort to nurture children is deemed deficient if it is not led by the parents themselves in close partnership with the church.”

“A second indicator of success is that these churches were strategically equipping parents to help children develop spiritually.”

Third, these churches were “witnessing elements of transformation in children’s lives—not the mere recitation of facts but lifestyle transitions that suggest a deeper renovation of the heart and spirit.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Priority #3: Prayer**

George Barna: “In my judgment, the prayer investment made by the effective churches may be the single most important venture of their ministries. I found that the most productive children’s ministries have five streams of prayer offered to God:”

1. “The first of those is from teachers of the youngster. Teachers are encouraged to pray for each student on a regular basis.”

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<sup>3</sup> Barna, George, Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2003, pp. 101-102

2. "Teachers pray as a team, usually on a weekly basis, along with other staff and church leaders associated with the ministry to children."
3. "The involvement of intercessors who volunteer to faithfully pray for the teachers and students."
4. "Because the ministry to children is highly valued in these churches it is not surprising to find that the entire congregation frequently prays for that ministry. (We do this and we could do more)."
5. "The fifth avenue of prayer emanates from the parents. Some of these churches organize prayer times for parents, link parents with prayer partners etc."<sup>4</sup>

### **A Word to Those who Carry a "Living Cross"**

Charles Spurgeon:

*"No cross is so heavy to carry as a living cross. Next to a woman who is bound to an ungodly husband or a man who is unequally yoked with a graceless wife, I pity the father whose children are not walking in the truth, who yet is himself an earnest Christian. Must it always be so, that the father shall go to the house of God and his son to the alehouse? Shall the father sing the songs of Zion, and the son and daughter pour forth the ballads of Belial? Must we come to the communion table alone, and our children be separated from us? Must we go on the road to holiness and the way of peace, and behold our dearest ones traveling with the multitude the broad way, despising what we prize, rebelling against Him who we adore? God grant it may not be so..."<sup>5</sup>*

1. **Beware of the Accuser of the Brethren (Rev. 12:10)**
  
2. **"Surrender all worldly claim upon their lives in the hope that they will belong wholly to the Lord forever"**

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<sup>4</sup> Barna, George, pp. 102-104

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon's Sermons on Family and Home Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995 pp. 28

3. **Remember it ain't over till it's over.**

4. **Bow before the sovereign hand of God.**

*"And if anyone should raise the legitimate question: Will we then be sad throughout eternity because of those who are accursed and cut off from Christ in hell? Will heaven be a place of eternal grief? – the answer is no. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes . . . neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore" (Rev. 21:4). Why? Jonathan Edwards put it like this: "With respect to any affection that the godly have had to the finally reprobate, the love of God will wholly swallow it up. And cause it wholly to cease". Those who die in their sinful rebellion – we say it with tears now – will not have the power to hold heaven hostage with their own misery. Here we groan and weep. There we are consumed with the glory of Christ.'"<sup>6</sup>*

As you leave, please remember to stop by the next generation table in the atrium and consider practical ways that you can pursue the joy of the next generations with us.

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper--, Romans 9:1-5, November 10, 2002