



transforming church
for all ages

Child Dedication

Sermon Outline

Child Dedication: Mark 10: 13-16

Do you have lovely 'moments', but find the church doesn't truly grasp the responsibility and opportunity they have bring?

The idea of a 'Kodak moment' is something rare, a moment in time that is captured by a picture, or should have been captured by a picture. Are we in danger in the church of creating such moments when it comes to child dedication? We have a lovely moment with promises and prayers, families gathered, maybe even a cake, but that is it.

Child dedication is an awesome opportunity for the church community to come together and celebrate God's goodness and blessing. The moment, and what follows, needs to be taken more seriously though. The passage in Mark reminds us of the importance Jesus placed on children and that he was willing to truly give them his time, as must we.

We need to take the time to truly engage with dedicating children before God, seeking his blessing upon them and then following up and seeking to live out the promises we make.

The notes below are offered as suggestions to prompt your own thinking rather than as a ready-made sermon structure.

Background

In many ways this passage, versions of which are also found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, can seem to stand alone, although similar reactions are seen as in chapter 9 and verses 38-41. The disciples seem to feel they and/or Jesus are too good for some people, and that it is their role to decide who should be allowed to meet with Jesus, and who should not. Jesus clearly disagrees, as we see.

The practise of bringing children to be blessed by a teacher or rabbi would have been common. The people in this account would have been coming out of faith not superstition, similarly to the account of the women bleeding in Luke 8: 40-48.

Much has been written about Jesus' response to the disciples and the emphasis that can be put on the word 'indignant' (NIV translation). What is key is Jesus' response regarding the children, 'taking them in his arms'. There are varying degrees to which this act can be interpreted, but without a doubt he was showing his level of connection with and concern and value for the children. A passage such as this one, and its underlying message, can very easily be seen as referring to something Jesus did and (although loosely) linking to our practices and views.



The sermon – questions and suggestions

- » As described in *Baptist Basics 9: Children in the Church*, 'Infant presentation does not claim to make the child a Christian. This can only happen as the Spirit of God awakens faith and the response of repentance and faith is given (Acts 2:38).'
- » We might respond to the passage in Mark, in that we don't rebuke children like the disciples did, but has our act of child dedication simply become an act that sees us 'tick a box' having done our bit?
- » Jesus' response to the disciples' actions was one of being 'indignant' (NIV). What would his response be to our acts of child dedication?
- » Jesus challenges the disciples in saying 'the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these' (v14). Is there a need to consider this statement and the one that follows it, and their implications, more fully within our churches?
- » We're not told what happened to the children after Jesus had blessed them, but how do we ensure that the act of blessing, of child dedication is not the end, but just the beginning?

What does it mean to truly engage in Child Dedication?

- » Firstly, it is about giving thanks. All life is a gift from God. It is about taking the time to recognise who God is and the blessing he has given to parents, to a family and to the church. We say thank you for so many things in life; it's about pausing and recognising the 'wow' factor of what God has done in creating this new life.
- » Secondly, it is an opportunity to make promises. In the world today it is easy to make a promise one moment and then forget it the next - to change our minds. The promises made during a dedication service are promises that have been made many times by people, but how often are they truly grappled with? Do we personally seek to carry them out?
- » Thirdly, it is when we specifically invite God's blessing upon the child. This does not mean the child has become a 'Christian' or is 'saved', but it is seeking God's blessing upon the child to help it to grow, develop and flourish, and one day make the decision to follow Jesus.

Questions for further thought and discussion

- » How do we need to improve and develop the act of child dedication within our church? What is lacking? How is its full potential not being reached?
- » How can we creatively develop our acts of child dedication?
- » Do we view child dedication as something for church members and believers, or something that can engage with all parts of our community - those who are believers and those who are not?



Notes and illustrations

You want to have various baby photos around the room, whether of the leadership or maybe invite members to bring theirs in. You could see who can guess whose photo is whose.

In Luke 2: 21-40, we read how Jesus was presented in the temple. Child dedication is not a new thing.

You might want to play the opening scene from the film *The Lion King* when baby Simba is presented. This could serve as an introduction to the theme, or a discussion starter as to what in the clip mirrors our act of child dedication, and what is missing.

It is important to be aware of people within the church who may not have children for different reasons.

Further Reading

Baptist Basics 9: Children in the church

Gathering for worship pages 50-63



Children's Session

Child dedication: Mark 10: 13-16

How can we make the most of every child dedication within the church?

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. These sessions use the same passages to explore the same themes in a way that is relevant to children, and to enable to cross-over in terms of discussion between children and their parents.

Each session is divided up into eight sections: Welcome, Game, Quick Quiz, Bible Story, Thought, Activity, Prayer response and Finish. Apart from the activity, about five minutes should be allowed for each section. The activity is likely to take longer, nearer ten minutes.

The session outlines are not intended to be rigid programmes you must stick to. If there are regular elements to the times when you meet with the children in your group, include these, and do not be afraid to add in extra games or activities that you think would further enhance the session.

It is a good idea to plan ahead in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. If there is a rota of people who teach the children's groups at your church, it would be a good idea to get together ahead of the sessions so you can ensure as much continuity, and an overall sense of unified direction in terms of what you will be communicating.

Please note that these sessions are written to be used with children aged 5-11, however some elements may need to be adapted to suit younger children.

Welcome

As the children gather, have the banner/poster from the previous sessions for them to decorate together. With the words 'Today...not tomorrow - Transforming the church for all ages' written on it, provide colouring pens or pencils for the children to use, remembering that this does not have to be completed in one session, but is designed to take the six weeks.

As the children gather and start to colour, begin by asking how they are doing that day. Once they've had a chance to briefly share, ask them the following two questions:

- » What colour would you use to describe the week you've just had?
- » What was one really sad thing that happened this week?

Share with the children how, over the next few weeks when you meet, you will be looking at different topics that will help everyone think about the phrase on the banner and what it means.



Game

Depending on the number of children you are working amongst, get them into smaller groups and give each group a newspaper and roll of sticky-tape. Each group has to try and make the tallest tower that will hold a tennis ball, from the newspaper.

Share with the children how, in the same way that the tower is meant to hold the tennis ball in the air, the act of child dedication is in part about promising to support the infant/baby as it grows up, helping them to discover Jesus for themselves.

Quick quiz

The following three questions are designed to help get the children thinking. You may simply want to ask them for their response, you could get them to write them on post-its and stick them up, maybe talk with the person next to them or something else.

- 1 Why do you think babies or infants are dedicated in Baptist churches?
- 2 How important do you think it is for a baby or infant to be dedicated, and why?
- 3 Do you think it makes any difference, or is it just about that one Sunday when the special service takes place?

Bible Story

Invite the children to close their eyes. Describe to them the setting of the story from Mark 10:13-16:

- » Jesus had just been asked some questions by some religious leaders.
- » Possibly sitting in a house or square, grassy area.
- » People coming to him for lots of reasons.
- » Might have been a hot day, they would have definitely been busy.
- » Disciples were there to learn from Jesus.

Read the passage from Mark 10:13-16 to the children, encouraging them to keep their eyes shut and imagine what was happening.

Thought

The thoughts are split into three subsections; the 'Grab' serves as an introduction and something to 'grab' their attention. The 'What does it say?', refers to the bible passage and brings out something of the teaching from the bible directly. The 'What should we do?' then applies the teaching to their lives, helping them think through what difference this should all make in their lives.

Grab

Invite a parent who has had their child dedicated. Ask them the following three questions:

- » Why dedicate?
- » What promises made?
- » Easy or hard to keep?



What does it say?

Explain to the children that in the passage, Jesus' actions show how important he thinks children are and how there is much the church can learn from them. Go on to share with the children that in the same way as in this passage Jesus makes it clear that we need to look after children and help them grow both physically and spiritually. Share with the children that when a child is dedicated we don't believe that makes them a Christian or a follower of Jesus, because that is a choice we all have to make for ourselves. Dedication is about parents and the church giving thanks for the life of the child, making promises as to how they will try and bring them up and asking God's blessing upon the child.

What should we do?

Share with the children that everyone can be part of a dedication in the church - children, youth and adults - can all share in the promises made. Find out before the session what specific wording of promises is used in your church and share this with the children – invite them to share what they make of the promises? Do they understand them? Do they think they make sense?

Ask the children if they know whether they were dedicated when they were younger? You could get in touch with the parents of the children you work amongst to find this out before the session.

Share with the children that being dedicated doesn't make them a Christian or a friend of Jesus. That is something each child dedicated needs to decide for themselves.

Activity

To help the children think about how the promises made at a dedication are more than just for that moment, explain how they will now have the opportunity to make a picture frame. Share how, although a picture frame has one picture in it of one moment, can have its picture changed. The same frame can, over time, have pictures from throughout someone's entire life.

Depending on your budget, there are two options of how the children can make a photo frame:

- a) Give each child an envelope, A6 works well and if possible one with a stiff back. Get them to cut out (or cut out for them depending on their age) a rectangular hole in one side (for the photo to be seen through) that leaves a 1 cm edge round the outside. The children can then decorate the envelope using colouring pens or other arts and craft items you may have. Finally they need to stick a piece of string in a loop on the back so the frame can be hung up.
- b) Give each child a CD case, the thinner 'single' type CD case works best. Give each child a piece of paper that is the right size to slot into the CD case, where the CD information booklet would usually go. Get them to cut out (or cut out for them depending on their age) a rectangular hole in the piece of paper (for the photo to be seen through) that leaves a 1 cm edge round the outside. The children can then decorate the piece of paper using colouring pens. Finally they need to stick a piece of string in a loop on the back so the frame can be hung up.



Prayer

As you draw the session to a close, ask the children if there is anything they would like to talk to Jesus about, to pray about. It could be about something from the session today or something else. Make sure the children are given a chance to share and do not belittle any of their requests, however trivial we might think them to be.

Having given them all a chance to share, explain how you will now have a time talking to Jesus and any of them who would like to talk out loud can do so, although they can also talk to him quietly in their heads. You might like to pass a bible round at this point so the child holding the bible prays, although ensure they know that they can pass it on without saying anything. It is a good idea to start and end the time of prayer by praying yourself.

Finish

As the children go, leave them with the challenge:

- » What one thing could they do to help those younger than them, other children, grow as disciples - as friends of Jesus?



Youth Session

Child dedication

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. Because youth groups may meet during the week and may also hear the sermons, these sessions use different passages to explore the same themes in a way that is more relevant to young people.

Each session is divided into four sections: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness. This approach has been used to provide a simple structure which lends itself to involving young people in leading. With support, young people (especially older ones) can be encouraged to lead a section of the session; or the whole session could even be shared out amongst them. For this to happen it is worth planning ahead to think who can be asked and how they can be best supported to do their bit. It may be appropriate to meet with them in advance, or communicate in some way about what is required.

Another reason to plan ahead is in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. For example, this session requires a way of offering the young people a warm welcome. You will also need a way to play video clips from the internet.

At the end of the session are a number of additional resources. There is a song suggestion (with YouTube link) and an optional movie clip for each session should these be appropriate. There are also some suggestions for making the sessions more active – particularly for younger groups or those who just enjoy more physicality.

Welcome

Make a special effort to be extra welcoming to the group for this session. Maybe put up a welcome sign, shake hands with them as they come through the door and say “welcome”, offer hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows – whatever you think your group might appreciate!

Ask:

- » What’s the best welcome you’ve ever received?
- » What’s the best welcome you’ve ever given?
- » How did it make you feel?

Worship

Read Psalm 66:1-12 from The Message version (available here: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2066:1-12&version=MSG>)



Ask:

- » Why might we want to welcome God – isn't he already here?
- » What does it mean for our hearts and minds to welcome him?
- » Are there times we are unwelcoming to God?
- » How?

Brainstorm some ways in which you could welcome God and if possible do some of them. See if the group can make a huge noise to give God a 'thunderous welcome'!

Word

Ask:

- » Who has been at a child dedication service at some point in their lives?
- » What do you remember about it?
- » What do you think is going on at one of these?
- » Is it something important?

Read Mark 9:33-37

Ask:

- » Why are children so important in God's Kingdom?
- » What do they have to teach us?
- » Why is it important for us to welcome children?

Act out how a dedication would usually be done at your church using a doll/teddy/Action Man or even one of the young people. Other group members could perform the other roles – minister, parents, Godparents, etc. Use the same wording as would be used in a service. Use this as a basis to discuss what it's all about, what the various people have committed to, etc. Draw out the themes of thanksgiving, promises and blessing.

Read verse 37. Jesus draws a parallel between welcoming children, welcoming him and welcoming God.

Ask: Do the ways we looked at for welcoming God help us to think how we should welcome children? How can we improve how we dedicate children?

Witness

Look again at the promises made as part of the dedication service.

Ask:

- » Are these things only for adults to do?
- » What have we committed to do when we have made these promises?
- » How can we live out this commitment and encourage the younger children in their faith and as part of the church community?

Have a list of the younger children in the church available and encourage each of the young people to identify one of the children whom they will pray for and seek to encourage.



Other resources

Song: Here for You by Matt Redman - <http://youtu.be/dtj-G1gKnD8>

Movie Clip: This clip from *Big Daddy* could be used to spark a discussion drawing comparisons with how welcoming we really are to children in church: www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/big-daddy/kangaroo-song

For younger (or more active) groups

Welcome: Play the old game sometimes called 'Clusters' or 'Huddles'. Everyone stands up, the leader calls out a number and everyone has to get into a group of that size. Those who don't manage it are out. The last group needs to be two people and they are the winners. Use this as a discussion starter about how welcoming they were to each other in the game and how it felt to be included or rejected.

Worship: Clapping, stamping, shouting, drums, air horns, kazoos and vuvuzelas may, or may not, be appropriate – but are all ways a thunderous welcome could be more active!

