



**Date:** June 1-2, 2019

**Speaker:** Matt Loveday, Family Ministries

**Scripture:** Parenting (Spiritually)

As we continue in our sermon series discussing our core value of community, I want us to consider what we have already witnessed here this morning, because in so many ways it reflects what we are going to talk about today. We have seen a family (a smaller community of people closely knit together and brought together by God) come and stand before another family (a larger community of people closely knit together and brought together by God) for the sake of the next generation—young lives still taking shape, full of need and yet to find a firm footing in life. And yet these babies represent all of us in many ways don't they—for even as the years go by, as our lives take shape, we realize we still have needs.

It's obvious with a baby. A baby needs people to care for it, a mom, a dad, grandparents, aunts and uncles. A baby needs a family otherwise it will not survive. It may be a bit less obvious for us as we get older. We embrace the world's ideology of independence and self-sufficiency and do our best to project adults who are self-reliant and capable. But if we are honest, we know the truth. We still need a family—a group of people who will surround us with love and care, encouragement and comfort, practical help and personal connection—we need a community.

The bible reveals to us that God created us, man and woman in his image and God is clearly but mysteriously revealed to us throughout scripture as a triune God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Not three God's but one God in three persons—together in perfect relationship. Genesis 2 tells us that when God made Adam he saw that it was not good for him to be alone so he made Eve and gave them a commandment to be fruitful and multiply, to create a family...and it was good. It was good to live and experience the

fullness of what God has made together in relationship with God and with each other, in family.

As we know, the story takes a sharp and unfortunate turn when Adam and Eve disobey God and relationship, and family have struggled and suffered ever since. And yet God is still a God who desires relationship and community and so he sets into motion his plan to restore and bring hope to all relationships and sends God the son to be born into a human family, born of a virgin, son to an earthly step-father. God makes a choice to enter into our human family and get this, he comes as a baby—full of need, just like one of these young babies we saw this morning. A baby—a baby in need of someone to care for him in relationship—in need of a mother, a father, aunts and uncles—in need of a family, a community. It's amazing really...no it's really amazing that God would value relationship, family and community so much that he would be willing to step into it even in its brokenness in order to redeem it. Community is something God deeply values and so as the people of God—community is valued by us...family is valued by us...people deeply connected to one another in caring and truth telling relationships.

The appealing beauty that community is built upon is this idea that we all need each other and that life is lived more fully when we experience it and live in it together. However, the difficulty comes in our brokenness—our imperfect families, our imperfect relationships that divide us because of pain, hurt, failure and so much more. None of us are immune. Despite the perfect pictures we post on Instagram alongside our perfectly plated dinners, despite the Christmas cards we send each year that has the one picture in 1,000 of our family that looks half decent. You know what I'm talking about. None of us is

immune from the brokenness that enters into our families unwanted and uninvited.

Nevertheless, the message God speaks to us time and time again in scripture, the hope that beats deep within our longing hearts, the desire that God continually puts in front of us in order to keep us pressing on is this: that in Jesus, our relationships can find healing and new life despite our brokenness as we learn to live together in the family of God. But we cannot do this on our own—we need the power of God and we need each other in order to live better together—in community. How do we do this? How do we live better together in community?

This morning I want to look at a passage of scripture that give us a glimpse into the life of Jesus as a 12 year-old boy, a pre-teen. Oh, man...parents all across the room just had a shiver run up and down their spines. Yes, Jesus born as a baby meant that Jesus was also a toddler (it's hard to imagine Jesus being a terrible two), Jesus was a preschooler full of learning, silliness and temper tantrums, Jesus would have been a kid with boundless energy, Jesus would have been a pre-teen, a teen, and an adolescent, just like us, and parents in the room, just like our kids.

Well, probably not just like our kids—but Jesus walked with us through all the ages and stages of life, through all the struggles and awkward realities that come with it. Including growing up. This passage is unique in that it is the only passage in the bible where we hear about what life was like for Jesus as a child. We all know his life as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger and we all know his life as an adult in a ministry of teaching and healing – but what about those in between years, what was family life like for Jesus as a boy? Let's read from Luke chapter 2 and starting at verse 41 – and as we read this passage we'll discover some truth about family and about community that will help us today learn to live better together in our homes and in our church as community.

*Luke 2:41-42*

*<sup>41</sup> Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival.<sup>42</sup> When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual.*

Notice a couple of phrases in these verses...every year and as usual. Jesus family had routine—every year they went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival...as usual. Families, we have our routines don't we? I know my family does. Routine is what makes many days even doable. Routine is needed in our families. Every year Jesus' family would go to the Passover festival. This was a week-long celebration of God's goodness and faithfulness specifically focused on God's work of delivering the Jews from Egyptian slavery and bringing them into the Promised Land. It was a festival, it was a party. They had fun together as a family. A part of their family routine was fun!

Recently I watched a webinar put on by the Barna Research group. It was a large study on faith in the household and one of the things they discovered was this:

**Spiritually vibrant households are characterized by fun and quality time.** Games, singing, reading and sports are common group activities among households that Barna defines as vibrant. Imagine that, fun helps to make our families and our communities more spiritually vibrant. A caring community, a truth telling community also needs to be a fun community. Enjoy one another, make fun a part of your routine. We have our routines in church don't we? We have our routine spots we like to sit, our routine place we like to hang out after the service, or our routine people we like to converse with. As we live in community here at North Park why not look to intentionally add a little more fun into the time we spend together? What if a standard question we started to ask each other around here was this: Are you having fun? Can I tell you that there is a group of people here at this church who get this right most of the time—it's the kids. It's the Jr High and High Schoolers. We can all learn from them. If we want to live better in community we need to widen the circle of fun. We need to make enjoyment, laughter and celebration a part of our routine.

So let me encourage you this morning to widen the circle of fun and enjoyment in your home and in our church. Not just every once in a while, make a habit of it, make it a part of your routine to celebrate and enjoy being together as a part of God's family.

Tonight the Toronto Raptors play the Golden State Warriors in Game 2 of the NBA finals at 8pm and down in the theatre we will be live streaming the game on the big screen for anyone who wants to come and enjoy community and enjoy basketball together. We're calling it "We the North Park"! Isn't that great? Invite along a friend or neighbour and come join us for some fun tonight!

*Luke 2:43-44*

*43 After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, 44 because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.*

Here are a couple of things we are going to lean into a bit in these verses. Other travelers and relatives and friends. Alright, before I talk about these things let me acknowledge the elephant in the room or rather in the passage. Mary and Joseph didn't miss Jesus at first!? What? I know you caught that and some of you immediately went to parent shaming. I mean how can Mary and Joseph pack up after a week in Jerusalem and hit the road and leave behind the son of God? Am I right?

What kind of a parent do you have to be to let that happen? But look, before you get on your high horse, or before I get on mine, I remember a time when our oldest son Gabriel was about 4 or 5 and we went to Covermead in Aylmer for the day (a great place for some good family fun by the way), and upon arriving there realized that Gabriel had gotten into the van without shoes on. What kind of parent brings their kid to a bee farm with no shoes? The truth is we all make mistakes as parents. Guaranteed some are bigger mistakes than others, but still, we make mistakes. To be fair to Mary in this situation, she had probably spend the whole day packing up for everyone in her family, Joseph was getting that donkey ready to go again, check out time at their hotel was probably 11 and the pressures of travelling with family were mounting, stress was high and Jesus was 12, and while there is no textual evidence for this I imagine Jesus had a couple of siblings already by this time, so in the stress of a time like this...you do a quick head

count... 1-2-3 close enough, we're good let's go. Oops, has anyone seen Jesus?

But let's look beyond that for a second and notice their support network. They assumed that Jesus was among the other travelers. You see, this is different than life today. This pilgrimage to Jerusalem would have been done in community, not just in family. There would have been extended family, neighbours and friends, families who they worshiped with in Nazareth on a regular basis. This was a community trip and Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus would have been with their community. Wow! I find this amazing. That the community played such an important role in the family that an assumption like that could be made. When he didn't show up that evening, a whole day of travelling happened and when Jesus didn't show up for bed that night, they started looking for him among their family and friends. In this we see that for Jesus and his family, community included a network of people, family, friends, and fellow-travelers.

When crisis hits, when hardship falls in your life, who do you reach out to? In order to live better together is community you need to widen your circle of support. We were never meant to do life alone as individuals or alone as a family unit. Living in community means living with the knowledge that you need the help and support and care of other people who can help you and your family in times of need.

Last week, Pastor Shane did a great job of challenging us in the area of fellowship in our church community. If you want to belong, if you want to go deeper in faith, if you want to grow in community you need to find someone who you see is living like Jesus and ask to walk with them. It goes the other way as well. You can walk up to someone who you know has a need and offer to walk alongside and support them. You need somewhere to start? Look at the families who stood before us today. They have expressed their desire to be good parents knowing full well they are going to fail along the way, they can't do it alone. They have asked God for help and they have done it here in front of us as a community. We have a responsibility to not just say we will support them, but we will actually make the effort to widen our circle of influence and get to know them, to

discover how we can love them, support them and encourage them as they raise their kids to know the deep, deep love of God.

Widen the circle of your influence in community. This doesn't mean that you reach out to every individual or young family you see, but let me ask you this...are you reaching out to one? It was Andy Stanley who said, "Do for the one what you wish you could do for the many." If we carried this mentality into our church community and widened the circle of support we give to one another by just one, we'd be better together.

*Luke 2:45-47*

*<sup>45</sup> When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. <sup>46</sup> Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. <sup>47</sup> All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

Let's continue reading from Luke 2, we're now at verse 45. They find 12-year old Jesus, three days later. Now remember they had travelled a day away from Jerusalem, so they had to travel a day back, that's two days, so on that third day they found Jesus and where was he? In the Temple with the religious leaders, listening and asking questions.

Kara Powell is the executive director at the Fuller Youth Institute in California and in their studies of youth they notice trends. One trend is that more and more it appears to be that after high school students are leaving the church or at least disengaging with church. Some stats will say that as high as 86% of youth fail to connect with a church after high school. This is truly alarming, and while some researches talk about how that number may be inflated, the fact remains a lot of young people disengage from church after grade 12. However, another trend that Kara Powell and her team at Fuller Seminary have noticed is that if a student has 3 or more caring adults who have consistently been a part of their growing up years and intentionally been there to model faith and be supportive, the chances they remain connected to faith and to church into adulthood increases dramatically.

As a result, Kara Powell and her team encourage parents and churches to surround children and youth with at least 5 caring adults from outside of the family who can influence faith and help build faith into their lives. You see parents, can't do the job of faith development on their own. And here, we see that Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple sitting at the feet of the religious teachers, listening and asking questions. Jesus, as a preteen boy, sitting with adults of faith listening and asking questions.

An article in Christianity Today magazine that talks about a study done by the evangelical fellowship of Canada called Renegotiating Faith In Young Adulthood – says this, "The Church is an intergenerational body, and the nuclear family on its own is [an] insufficient discipleship environment," "Every child, teen, and young adult should have adult believers speak into his or her life in various contexts—learning to exercise leadership, how to have conversations, knowing what it means to be human, ways that crises are navigated.

In our family ministry department here at North Park—we desire for kids and student to have a consistent influence upon the lives of the kids and youth who attend our weekend services and mid-week programs, because we fully embrace this idea that to maximize our influence on the life of young person for the long term, we **MUST** widen the circle of influence in their lives. The more consistently we can build relationship with young people and the more intentional we can be to listen and ask questions together with them, the greater chance they will have of developing a lasting faith in them.

I can't help but show a couple of pictures here of some of our team at work on the weekends. As they scroll through, I want you to see adults of all ages, making the choice to serve on a weekend, to get to know a child, to sit with them around a table or on the floor, to show them God's love, to teach them about Jesus, to listen to them and their questions. I love these people. They are some of the 5 who are teaching and leading my kids in their faith and I am so thankful for them. I can't do it on my own...we **MUST** do this together as a community.

Parent's – let me challenge you to widen the circle of your kids influence and let me ask you to get to know the adults and young people who are loving

and discipling your children on a weekend or midweek program. At drop off or pick up time, say hello, say thank you and please get to know their name. This person is pouring out the love of Jesus into your kids' life and believe me, you want to know them and you want to keep them in your kid's life over the years. Have them over sometime for a meal, invite them into your home, encourage them and help build that relationship between this amazing faith builder in your kids' life and your family. Be intentional to widen the circle of influence in your kids' life.

And adults in the room, with kids or without, married or single, young or old, male or female, let me challenge you to be a difference maker in the lives of the next generation. Be one of the 5. Build into this community and build into our community by offering your time and your heart to the next generation. As a community of faith, let's widen the circle of influence for the next generation by being a consistent presence in their spiritual development, whether they're your kids or not. This isn't a plea for volunteers, it's a calling to step into greater purpose and greater connection and greater impact in our church community and in the lives of individual kids who so desperately want to sit with you and listen and ask questions. The truth is simply this: you don't have to be a birth parent to be a life-giving influence into the life of the next generation. This church is filled with spiritual mothers and fathers, spiritual aunts and uncles, spiritual big brothers and sisters. It takes all of us to live in community but we have to choose to sit together and listen and learn.

It says in verse 47 that all who heard 12-year old Jesus were amazed at his understanding and his answers. Investing in the lives of kids will amaze you. The Barna research study I talked about earlier also found something else to be true when it comes to a spiritually vibrant home. They discovered that

**Kids become a catalyst for any interaction, including faith-related ones.** Kids are a catalyst for faith related interactions. This is so true. Let me tell you one quick story from my four-year old son Micah. I can't explain this except that God is powerfully at work in his life thanks to a wide circle of influence. He told us one day that he had a dream, and in this dream was a lamb and this lamb's

heart was pushing out of his body and breaking. The lamb was dying. So in the dream Micah ran to his other families house (yes he has another imaginary family and the coolest thing about them is that in this family he has 4 dogs and his very own motorcycle). So he gets his motorcycle and brings along an extra helmet—races back to the lamb, puts the helmet on the lamb (because you know safety first) and then Micah tells us that in his dream he took the lamb to Jesus. Christine and I smile at his sweetness and marvel at his kind heart. Then he says that when he brought the lamb to Jesus, Jesus took out his own heart and gave it to the lamb at which point the lamb ran up to Jesus and gave him a big hug. So now Christine and I are sobbing and thinking how absolutely beautiful this is. Then Micah finishes the story by saying, and do you know what mommy? In my dream...in my dream Jesus had so many hearts to give away. At his point we just thanked God for his amazing goodness and his involvement in the heart and the mind of our son.

Now, I share this story not to elevate our son or to elevate ourselves in any way, but to elevate the work of God in and through a wide circle of loving influence that Micah has in his life. Christine and I do our best, but we're not perfect parents, we mess up so much. We have an extended family and we know Micah is deeply influenced by them and we also know that Micah has come to his class here at North Park and listens and observes his leaders over the last two years. Hannah, Joanne, Mariah, Ann and Dave and others. To them I say thank you! Thank you so much for loving and teaching Micah about Jesus. This is an amazing story of God at work in and through community as we intentionally, consistently and lovingly widen the circle of influence in the lives of the next generation.

Now let me finish by reading the rest of the story.

*Luke 2:48-49*

*<sup>48</sup> His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."*  
*<sup>49</sup> "But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

But notice what Jesus says, why did you need to search, didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house? This is the first time in scripture where Jesus refers to his heavenly father. Jesus knew his family was beyond biological, that God's plan was connected to something bigger, a larger family. I hope we all come to know and embrace that too.

*Luke 2:51-52*

*51 Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. 52 Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.*

Jesus returns home with his parents. He was obedient to them and he grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people. Isn't this what we want? To grow in wisdom and in favor with God and all people? Isn't that what we hope our community does for each and every one of us? To be deeply connected to one another in caring and truth telling relationships. If this is truly what we value, how then should we live? What we value comes back to our mission:

*To inspire, support and mobilize one another to live more like Jesus, that we may be a life giving and transforming presence in our families, community and world.*

The strength of our community here at North Park is not us. It is Jesus in and through us. We can't miss this, the strength of our community here at North Park or at 1750 or in Stratford is not in us, it is Jesus in us and through us.

When we become more like Jesus that is when we become a life giving and transforming presence to those around us, in our families, in our community and in our world. It's when we become more like Jesus. When you become more like Jesus, you make your marriage better. When you become more like Jesus you make your families stronger. When you become more like Jesus you make your church community better. When you become more like Jesus you make your city better. When you become more like Jesus you make your world better. When we become more like Jesus, you become better. More like Jesus...more like Jesus.

## Points to Ponder

### **A Generous Faith ~ Kindness**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. When have you experienced fun in community? Has fun always been a part of your church family experience? Why or why not? What benefits have resulted from fun being a part of your own spiritual development?
2. Discuss a time when brokenness (hurt, disappointment, failure) had a direct impact on community in your life. How did forgiveness and reconciliation come from that brokenness? If it still exists, what do you think can be done to help move toward healing?
3. Who has been a significant spiritual influence in your life outside of your immediate family? How has this person helped to shape you in your faith development? Is there someone in your life right now that you are intentionally building into? If so, what does that look like and in what ways has it helped you grow as well?
4. Describe a time in your life when a young person under the age of 18 (maybe even your own child) helped you see or understand the work or message of God more clearly in your own life?
5. Building a strong community that values deep, caring and truth-telling relationships takes intentionality. What barriers do you think exist for building this kind of community? What practical steps can you take in your life to overcome these barriers?
6. Think of two individual or families that you know through community. Think intentionally about how you could encourage, love and support them this coming week and think of how and when you will put those thoughts into action. Take a few moments right now to pray for them.