

UPSIDE DOWN RELATIONSHIPS

Title: Part 3 – “They Were Never Yours”

Date: October 4, 2026

As we continue in this moment of worship and prepare for the teaching of God’s Word, let’s PAUSE and get still for just a second. Everyone close your eyes and take a deep, slow breath with me. Now, into this quiet, I want you to give God everyone and everything—every person you’re carrying, every worry you walked in with, every outcome you can’t control... AND give Him your SELF. The part of you that wants to drive the bus and demand its own way. Just open your hands and hand it all up to God because He cares for you. God, we give you everyone and everything.

[PRAYER TIME]

Hey, before you grab a seat, take thirty seconds and say “Hi” to the people around you, tell them you’re glad they showed up today. AND while everyone is saying “Hi” here in the house I want to say “Hi” to our church family joining us online, we’re glad you’re here! We’d love to pray for you and walk with you. So, reach out and let us know how we can serve you through the Care & Prayer tab on our app.

Well, we are in week 3 of a collection of messages about our relationships, anyone want to hear one of my recent relational failures? A few weeks ago, I caught myself parenting out of my needs instead of my kids needs, does that ever happen to you?

So, it was a couple weeks after school started, and I was tired of doing the car line at Sunlake High School. If you don’t know, it is horrible! Sophie and I were leaving the house at 6:35 and barely getting her to school by 7:05 when the bell rings. So, I had been eyeing up the teacher parking lot and how someone could easily pull right in, drop a kid off, and then get back on the road. And that’s exactly what I tried to do one morning despite Sophie’s protest as she is mortified of getting in trouble and causing a scene. BUT I didn’t listen because it was all about me and how much time I was wasting. Long story short, I get stopped by an admin trying to turn into the teacher lot, I lie... kick her out of the car, and then get waved down and yelled at by two more admin working the parking lot. Everyone in front of the school knew about the dude in the red truck who couldn’t follow the rules.

You would think I’d do everything within my power as a dad to make her freshman year as smooth as possible, but no, I had to make it about me. So, NOW... I drop her off at AutoZone and make her walk 😊

If you have a Bible with you or the Bible app on your phone, join me in **Psalm 127**. That will be almost in the very middle of your Bible. Psalm 127 was written by King Solomon about three thousand years ago AND it’s part of a collection called the Songs of Ascents. These were songs families sang together as they walked uphill to Jerusalem for the big

festivals. Imagine dads with toddlers on their shoulders, moms counting heads, teenagers walking twenty feet behind pretending they're not with them, this is what they sang as they did that. Psalm 127, starting in verse 1:

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. ² In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. ³ Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. ⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

So, good... short and sweet, but packed with so much wisdom.

Before we jump into unpacking this, just to get us back in the flow, as I mentioned we are in a collection of messages called *Upside Down Relationships*, and it's all about what to do when you've tried everything else.

AND two weeks ago, when we started this, we didn't talk about a single one of your relationships—on purpose! We talked about the SELF. E. Stanley Jones, the missionary we've been leaning on for this journey, said that no matter what road he went down, with whatever person, on whatever problem, he kept finding the same thing at the end of it. He said:

“I only have one remedy, for I find only one disease—self at the center; self trying to be God.”

Only one disease! So, what do we do with the self? Do we try to eliminate the self or know and express it? Jesus says neither, you hand it to Him! Surrendering your SELF to Jesus is the only way any of this works.

AND last week we saw the first overflow, into marriage, we said love doesn't keep score. Jesus didn't wait for us to go first. He handed Himself over, the same phrase the Gospels use for Judas's betrayal, but flipped upside down into the greatest act of love in history.

If you missed either of the first two weeks you can grab them on our app or website, BUT before we move on, I want to camp here for a minute longer, because this is where the whole thing either works or falls apart. Why is surrender the ONLY way to give self-giving love? Why can't I just try harder?

Here's why. **A self that hasn't been surrendered can't actually give; it can only trade.** And don't hear me wrong, un-surrendered people give all the time. They're generous, they volunteer, they bring organic, dye free snacks to the kids soccer game for everyone. BUT every gift has a little string tied to it, something it needs back: approval, appreciation, the feeling of being needed. It's not purely a gift, it's also a subtle invoice with an expected payment date.

A surrendered self is different. Its deepest needs, to be loved, to be known, to be safe, to matter, are already being met by God. So, it can give without sending a bill. Because you can only give away what you don't need back.

Think about your hands for a second. Everyone make a fist. Now can you give anybody anything with a closed fist. Some of you are like, "A right hook..." But can you give anything, no! AND you also can't receive anything with one either. That's why we keep opening our hands in surrender. It's the posture of a self that's been handed over.

AND nowhere is that truer than with this week's relationship. **Your kids!** Parenting is the most self-giving thing a human being can do, amen? You give up sleep. You give up money. You give up hobbies and things you enjoy. You give up your car's upholstery. You gave up ever using the bathroom in peace again! Nobody gives more than a parent.

BUT parenting is also where the SELF hides the best. Remember what E. Stanley Jones said, the one disease, the "self trying to be God." AND there is nowhere we try harder to be God than with our kids. We want to be sovereign over their outcomes. We want to be all-knowing and ever-present, which is what the location-sharing app is for on your iPhone. Helicopter parenting is really just auditioning for a job that's already been filled by God.

And here's what makes that so dangerous. When you make your marriage all about you, your spouse will let you know. Trust me! BUT your kids can't. They don't have the words for it; they just feel the weight. And a child is also the one least capable of carrying a parent's self. When your worth rides on their grades, when your reputation rides on their choices, when your happiness rides on whether they call you back, you've handed a kid a weight that would buckle a grown man. A kid was never meant to hold a parent up!

So, here is the whole message. **Your kids get your love. They do not get your self.** Your self goes to God, AND only a mom or dad whose self is held by God can hold their kids with open hands.

Today, I want to preach a message out of the second overflow called:

They Were Never Yours

AND one more thing before we dig into this. If you don't have kids, or maybe you are a kid, don't check out on me today and start counting lights. Many of you are aunts, uncles, coaches, teachers, or the spiritual mom or dad to somebody in your life, this is for you. Some of you are a teenager today and this is especially for you. Maybe your kids are grown but they haven't returned your calls in a long time, stay with me, because the hero of today's story spent years standing exactly where you're standing.

AND with that said, here's the tension behind the message title. We say, "my kids" the same way we say, "my car" or "my phone." Those are *my* kids, right? And somewhere along the way, raising kids can become a SELF project. We turn our kids into little résumés. The honor roll bumper sticker isn't really about them, is it? The dad screaming at the Little League umpire is usually replaying his own at-bat from 1994.

And it starts early. Somebody posts that their ten-month-old is already walking, and you look over at your own kid scooting across the floor on his rear end like a two-legged Roomba and think, "What am I doing wrong?" Comparison doesn't wait for report cards!

AND as parents we are tired. Research from the University of California, Irvine and data evaluated by the Pew Research Center indicate that despite an increase in dual-income households, parents spend significantly more time focused on direct childcare now than they did in 1965! And yet, we have more guilt, more anxiety, and more exhaustion to show for it.

SO, what if the problem isn't that we're not doing enough? What if we're carrying something that was never ours to carry? If you're taking notes today, write this down, my first big takeaway is:

1. Let God build the house.

Let God build the house. How is it that we can spend more time with our kids and still feel so tired and guilty and anxious? Look at verse 1 again from Psalm 127:

¹ Unless the Lord builds the HOUSE, the builders labor in vain.

Now think about who wrote that, it was King Solomon. The man who built the Temple in Jerusalem, the biggest construction project in Israel's history. And he's the one telling us, "Unless God builds it, you're wasting your time."

BUT here is a cool little nugget. The Hebrew word for house here doesn't just mean a building. It means a household, a family, it's the same word the Bible uses for "the house of David." Solomon isn't just talking about drywall; he's talking about the family between the four walls of your home.

Look at verse 2 again now:

² In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— [Anybody been up in the middle of the night doing math on your kid's future? But then Solomon says] for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Some of you have been trying to build the house for years. Rising early, staying up late, carrying the whole blueprint around in your head—every appointment, every grade, every friend you're not sure about, every decision you're afraid they'll make. And you are so tired!

Hear me. You are not the general contractor of your kid's life, God is! He's had the blueprints since before they were born. Psalm 139 says He knit them together in the womb, and a God who starts a project like that doesn't walk off the job halfway through! You get to be a builder, but you don't have to be the architect. So put the blueprints down, beloved, go to sleep. He's got the night shift!

It reminds me of my favorite parenting story in all of Scripture, and it happens on one of these family trips up to Jerusalem that Psalm 127 was written for. Jesus was twelve years old. Mary and Joseph take Him up to the Passover festival, they celebrate, and then they head home... and they get a FULL DAY down the road before they notice Jesus isn't with them.

Now, be honest, raise your hands if you've ever lost a kid for only three minutes in a store. Do you remember that feeling? That was three minutes, Mary and Joseph lost the Son of God for **THREE DAYS**. Come on, for some of you that's the most comforting verse in the Bible!

When they finally find Him in the Temple, Mary says what every mom in this room has said at least once, "Son, why have you treated us like this?" And Jesus answers her: (Luke 2:49)

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

My point is that even the parents of the only perfect Kid in history had to learn that their Son belonged to His Father's house first, AND so do yours.

Verse 3 of Psalm 127 says:

³ Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.

When Solomon writes this he uses a very specific word for heritage. It is the same word used for the land God gave to the tribes of Israel. It was theirs to live on and work and care for. But it was never theirs to sell. The deed stayed in God's name.

AND that's your kids. The deed is in God's name because you are not the owner, you're a steward with a homework and bedtime routine.

So, because I want this to be super practical, I'm going to give you an action for each takeaway today and the first one is this. The next time you catch yourself pushing, pressuring, or panicking over your kid, stop and ask one question:

Is this for them, or for me?

Is all of this emotion and turmoil about them, or is it about me? I've asked that plenty of times and I haven't always liked the answer. But ask it, and then pray the prayer from week one, but put their names in it: "God, I give You everyone and everything, just put their names in, I give you my kids because they were Yours first.

Once you know **whose** they are, the next question is how do you treat something that belongs to Somebody else. Write this down, number 2:

2. Nourish them, don't grip them.

When you internalize that your kids don't belong to you, that you are in fact a steward, then you nourish them without gripping them so tightly that you aggravate them. This is the Apostle Paul's command, one chapter after the marriage passage we looked at last week, he writes this, Ephesians 6:4:

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Paul says to "bring them up" and get this, that word—the one we get this English phrase from—shows up exactly two times in the entire New Testament. Last week in Ephesians 5:29, where Paul says you nourish your own body so do that for your spouse. And then he uses it here, where he says nourish your kids. Paul used this word for nothing else in his writings.

Paul is saying, you already know how to nourish a body without anybody telling you. When **your** body's hungry, you feed it. When it's tired, you rest it. You don't make your stomach earn lunch. Now nourish your kids like that!

The Swiss reformer John Calvin translated this phrase in his commentary, "Let them be fondly cherished." Calvin argued that parenting should not be characterized by harshness, unreasonable severity, or fear-inducing discipline, which would break a child's spirit. **WHY? Because they don't belong to you!** But instead, he used the idea of "fondly cherishing" them to emphasize that a parents approach to raising children must be rooted in tenderness, warmth, and active affection BALANCED with the "instruction and reproof of the Lord." Sometimes the most cherishing thing you can do for a child is discipline them when they stray.

BUT notice the first half of the verse. Before Paul says nourish, he says don't exasperate (or in other translations, don't provoke them, don't push them into anger). And what does that faster than anything? **A parent who's parenting out of their own fear.**

How many of you remember Finding Nemo? Marlin the clownfish loses almost his entire family in the first five minutes, and he's left with one little son. So, he grips him. He hovers. He announces Nemo's weak fin to anybody who'll listen. He's so afraid of losing him that he's suffocating him. And what does Nemo do? Swims straight out into open water to touch a boat, just to prove he can. Marlin's fear produced the exact rebellion he was afraid of. And later, when Marlin says he promised he'd never let anything happen to his son, Dory says the most profound thing in the whole movie: **"Then nothing would ever happen to him."**

In 2014, researchers studied almost three hundred college students and found that the ones with over-controlling, "helicopter" parents reported significantly higher depression and lower satisfaction with life. WHY? Because it trampled their need to feel capable. Kids who are never allowed to do hard things never find out they can!

SO, mom and dad listen to me, I want to be clear. Involvement isn't the problem. Control is. Hovering isn't born out of love; it's born out of fear. And whose fear is it? Ours! The SELF again, sneaking in the side door.

But here's the good news. You have a Father in heaven who has never once exasperated you. He's never hovered over you out of fear, because He's not afraid of anything. He's never made you earn your lunch. He looks at you, with your whole messy parenting track record, and He fondly cherishes you! AND a parent who knows they're fondly cherished by God stops parenting out of fear. Because fear only grips what it's afraid of losing. And you can't lose what's already safe in the Father's hands! Amen?

SO, here is the practical application, before you correct your child this week, stop and ask:

What is my child really needing right now?

Is it attention? Encouragement? A snack? A nap? Maybe it is correction... BUT feed that first. And every single day this week I want you to say one sentence over them that's pure nourishment, with no "but" hanging off the end of it. Amen? What is the root behind this behavior and what is one blessing I can speak over them?

Alright, number three:

3. Sharpen them in the ordinary.

Connect this back to self-giving love, because this is the least glamorous version of it because nobody claps for the ordinary. Pay for them to attend some fancy private school and somebody notices. But nobody is ever going to pull you aside and say, "Hey, I saw you put your phone in the other room at dinner so you could really give your kids your attention. Powerful stuff!"

BUT it is in the ordinary that God says the best sharpening happens. Deuteronomy 6 is the most famous parenting passage in the Old Testament, and I want you to notice the ordinary moments it names. Moses says:

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Look at the order. On YOUR hearts... THEN impress them on your children. God starts with the parent, you can't pass on what you don't have. It's one surrender and then the overflow, right there in Deuteronomy.

BUT the word "impress" is the Hebrew word {shah-NAHN} shanan. It means to sharpen. To whet a blade by rubbing it across a stone, again and again. Other places in the Old Testament, it's the word used for sharpening arrows. Do you see the connection?

Psalms 127 says your kids are arrows. Deuteronomy 6 says you sharpen them. And look where the sharpening happens: sitting at home, walking down the road, lying down, getting up. The car line... breakfast... bedtime... the ride home from practice. The most boring minutes of your day are where God does some of His sharpest work!

This matters because we get this idea that faith gets passed down at church, so we make sure they are here as often as possible. And that is awesome and I love this place, but your kids are here for an hour or so a week. Your ordinary kitchen table gets them

way more than the church does, so we cannot abdicate our responsibility at home and expect faith to just be passed on! Amen?

BUT do you know the number one enemy of God using those ordinary moments in your home? The biggest enemy is HURRY. John Mark Comer said it this way:

“Hurry and love are incompatible.”

He goes on to say that his worst moments as a dad all happened when he was in a hurry. Sound familiar? It's because you can't sharpen an arrow in a hurry. That's how you get hurt! It has to be slow and methodical.

Some of you think you need a better parenting program. A better book. A better behavior strategy. You don't... what you need is a slower pace! Your kids will forget almost everything you ever lectured them about. But they will never forget the way you looked at them when they were talking.

Every car ride is a whetstone. Every bedtime prayer is a pass of the blade across. Every “tell me about your day” when you actually wait for the answer, that's God sharpening an arrow He's going to shoot into the future. Don't you dare call those moments small because Heaven doesn't!

So, here's the move:

Pick one ordinary window of time and be fully present.

It could be the car ride to school, making dinner, bedtime, doesn't matter, BUT put your phone in another room, and just be there. No agenda. No lecture. Just let the sharpening happen. You may or may not think you are a great parent, but every parent can do that!

Let God build the house. Nourish them, don't grip them. Sharpen them in the ordinary. BUT here's the thing about arrows. You don't sharpen them so you can keep them. Write this down, last one:

4. Hand them back.

Think about that. What good is an arrow you never let go of? It's just a pointy stick. Arrows are made for release. Everything we've talked about today is aimed at a moment when you open your hand as a parent. What did Solomon say? Verse 4 again:

⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. ⁵

Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.

The arrows are not made for the quiver; they are made to contend with the world as we hand them back. AND nobody in Scripture shows us what that looks like better than a woman named Hannah.

Hannah wanted a child more than anything, and year after year, it didn't happen. Her husband's other wife—long story—had kids and rubbed it in. Every year at The Feast of Tabernacles Hannah would cry so hard she couldn't eat. One year she was praying so desperately in the temple that the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk. So, she made God a promise: if You give me a son, I'll give him back to You. Look at 1 Samuel 1:

¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." ¹⁸ She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Don't miss that last part because she wasn't pregnant yet. Nothing had changed. But something in her had let go. She had opened her hands before God ever put anything in them. Hannah surrendered the outcome before she ever received it and the result was peace!

Eventually God gave her a son named Samuel. AND when Samuel was just a little guy, probably around three years old, she walked him up to that same temple... and did exactly what she said she would. Listen to her words, 1 Samuel 1:27-28:

²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

So, Samuel's whole life was an answered prayer, handed back. BUT don't miss what happens next, this is next level, Chapter 2, verse 19:

¹⁹ Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

Every year, a new robe... a little bigger than the last one. Sized by a mom's best guess at how much her boy had grown since she'd seen him last.

Church hear me, handing them back doesn't mean you stop loving them. It doesn't mean hands off. It just means open hands. You keep making the robe, you keep praying, you keep showing up, you just STOP holding the outcome.

This is for someone today. Some of you have a son or daughter who has walked away from God, or from you. Mom and Dad, keep making the robe! Keep saying their name in prayer! But put the outcome in the hands that have never dropped anything.

Maybe you are even a part of the group that seems to grow every year, you have an adult child who has cut off contact because a counselor encouraged it. AND maybe you honestly don't know why. So, what does self-giving love look like in those shoes? It looks like humility instead of a defense. If there's real hurt in your story, own it. No "but" hanging off the end. No "I did the best I could." And if you honestly can't see it, ask God to show you, and be ready to hear it someday. Then respect the boundary, even when it breaks your heart. No guilt trips. No sending Aunt Linda to deliver messages. No showing up uninvited. No passive-aggressive Facebook posts about ungrateful children. Pressure is just the self-trying to get back what it needs.

More than anything, it looks like the father in Jesus's story of the prodigal son. He didn't chase his boy into the far country. He let him go. But Luke says that "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him." Which means he'd been watching the road. That's what making the robe looks like when you're not allowed to deliver it. Keep the porch light on! Keep praying their name! And rest your worth in the hands of a Father who knows exactly what it's like to wait for a child to come home!

Because here's what I know about the hands you're handing your kids to. Remember week one? You can recognize them by the scars. And God has never once lost anything placed in His hands. Not a sparrow. Not a Samuel. Not your son. Not your daughter.

SO, what do we do with this? Here's the assignment, at some point this week, put your hand on each of your kids' shoulders, look them in the eye, say their name, and:

Speak a blessing over your kids out loud.

Why out loud? Because a blessing that stays in your head is just a nice thought. Spoken over somebody, it becomes something they can carry for a lifetime! AND it can be simple, look them in the eye and say:

You were God's before you were mine. I love you and I'm proud of you. And I'm handing you to the One who will never let you go.

If your kids are grown, call them. AND if you don't have kids, bless one in your life. A niece, the kid on your street, one of our kids here at church. Just speak a blessing over them.

AND know this, you are not handing your kids to a stranger today. You're handing them to a Father who already knows exactly what it costs to open His hands! A Father who gave up His Son to bring yours home! That's how much He loves them. Come on, that's how much He loves YOU!

The same God who took a borrowed tomb and made it an empty one can take the kid you're scared for and write a story you never could!

If you have kids, whatever age they are, wherever they are right now, I want you to open your hands in front of you and, in your mind, put their names in them. If you don't have kids, put the kid God just brought to mind in them. And as we pray, we're going to hand them back. Pray with me.

[PRAYER TIME]